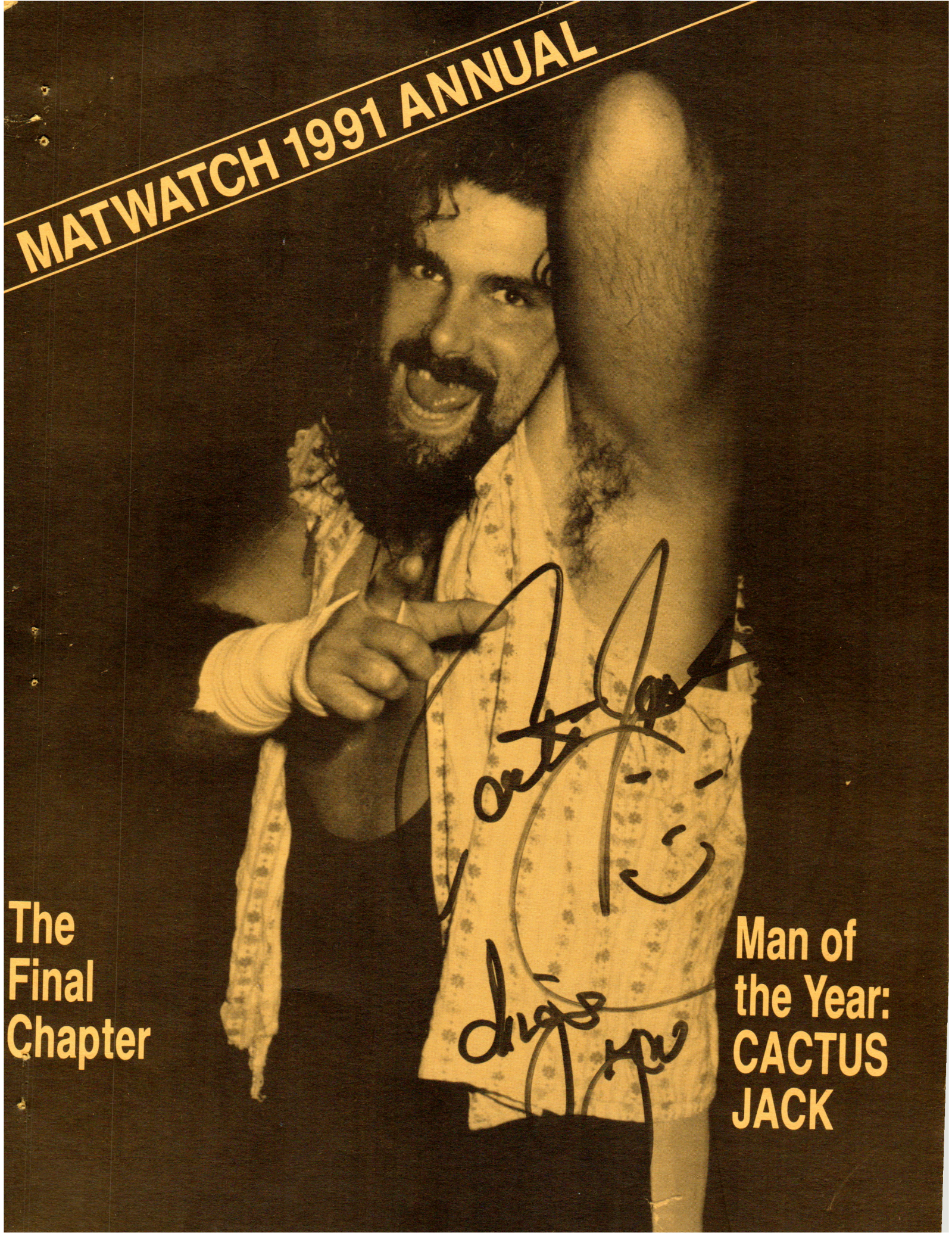


MATWATCH 1991 ANNUAL

**The
Final
Chapter**

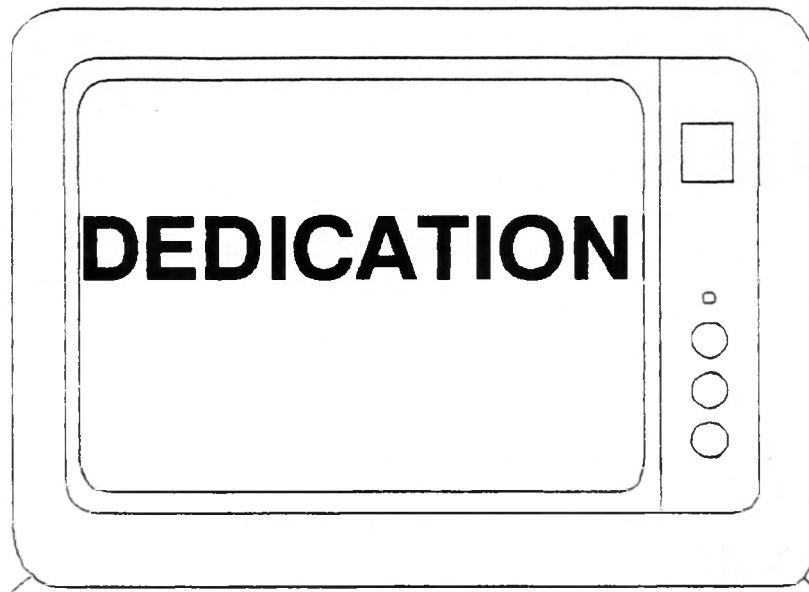
**Man of
the Year:
CACTUS
JACK**



MATWATCH:

The Final Chapter

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After four years of a publication, the list of people who have contributed to its success is always far too long to avoid unintended excusions. But consider those mentioned below only a small percentage of MATWATCHers who have been faithful and loyal subscribers and contributors since 1988. *MATWATCH: THE FINAL CHAPTER* is dedicated to every person who has purchased or read a bootleg copy of the newsletter since its birth. With special fondness, this annual is for the following:

--Ed Capral, the finest voice ever behind a wrestling mike and my favorite pen pal of the past three yeras.

--Dan Gibson, the 1988 MATWATCHer OF THE YEAR, who took me to my first mat card and has been family for 27 years.

--Elaine Thomas Stephens, the journalism teacher who launched me on this safari of a profession in 1969 and who now knows who Sting is.

--Jim Ross, the top voice behind a wrestling mike today, and a person who enjoys a conversation on topics other than wrestling.

--Richard Hyatt, my closest friend in journalism, who knows the point to help me apply the brakes.

--Paul Robinson, who gave me my first newspaper job in 1971 and who always had faith in my ability.

--Chris Crosby and Steve Sims, from L.A. and Chicago, who have been unerring in their support.

--Lance Russell, one of the most secure pros I know and a great booster of young people in the mat industry.

--Joe Pedicino, my most loyal friend, who has never apologized to anyone in the industry for that friendship.

--Craig Johnson, Scott Hudson and Steve Prazak, for getting a chance to work as broadcasters in this industry and succeeding.

--Dick Bourne and Mike Gunter, for being the two most pleasurable ringside companions at any mat show.

--Dave Meltzer, for his unwavering generosity and encouragement.

--Rebecca, my wife, for four years of patience and understanding.

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever had a situation where you looked back and said, "I wish I had done that sooner?" In a sense, I always had that feeling with *MATWATCH*. How exciting it would have been to develop the concept of a newsletter which follows the television side of wrestling during its greatest transition, in the early 1980s, as it regenerated from dozens of small-town studio programs to the Ted Turner-inspired Superstation to Vince McMahon's lavish explosion in 1984 on cable and syndication.

We moved in as pay-per-view was beginning to take shape, beginning only six weeks before Turner Home Entertainment's premiere *GREAT AMERICAN BASH*, only nine weeks after the creatively-horrible but highly-profitable *WRESTLEMANIA* WWF tournament to crown Randy Savage, and early enough to follow week-by-week negotiations for Turner Broadcasting System to salvage the financially-troubled Jim Crockett Promotions---then the surviving child of the National Wrestling Alliance.

The names of Capral and Solie, who led the industry from the 1950s to the 1980s, were giving away to the Rosses, the McMahons, the Schiavones, the Monsoons and the Browns. The era of the heel color commentator became of age in the names of Ventura, Heenan, Cornette, Dangerously and Hayes. We were able to see the fabled Lance Russell at last get a national berth and watch him abruptly and unfairly removed, though he's taken his shift in stride.

We've seen viewers subtly smartened to the fact that championships are not likely to change hands without television cameras present in an arena and the few attempts to do otherwise have not resulted in dramatic resurgences at the turnstiles.

The term oversaturation has become a member of the All-Cliche Team as almost unlimited exposure of wrestling on television has gobbled talent and most small independent promotions. The recent death of the Don Owen Portland show is one of the final tombstones to be carved on the genre of the local wrestling television show.

Wrestling on television is far from dead but it is no longer a novelty. It lacks the mystique its regeneration in 1984 (and ultimate return to network TV in 1985) developed which placed it alongside *ALL IN THE FAMILY*, *M*A*S*H* and *THE \$64,000 QUESTION* as true breakthrough television. Both of the big two groups have now diluted into respective hardcore followings with fewer and fewer crossover or casual fans finding their offerings compelling.

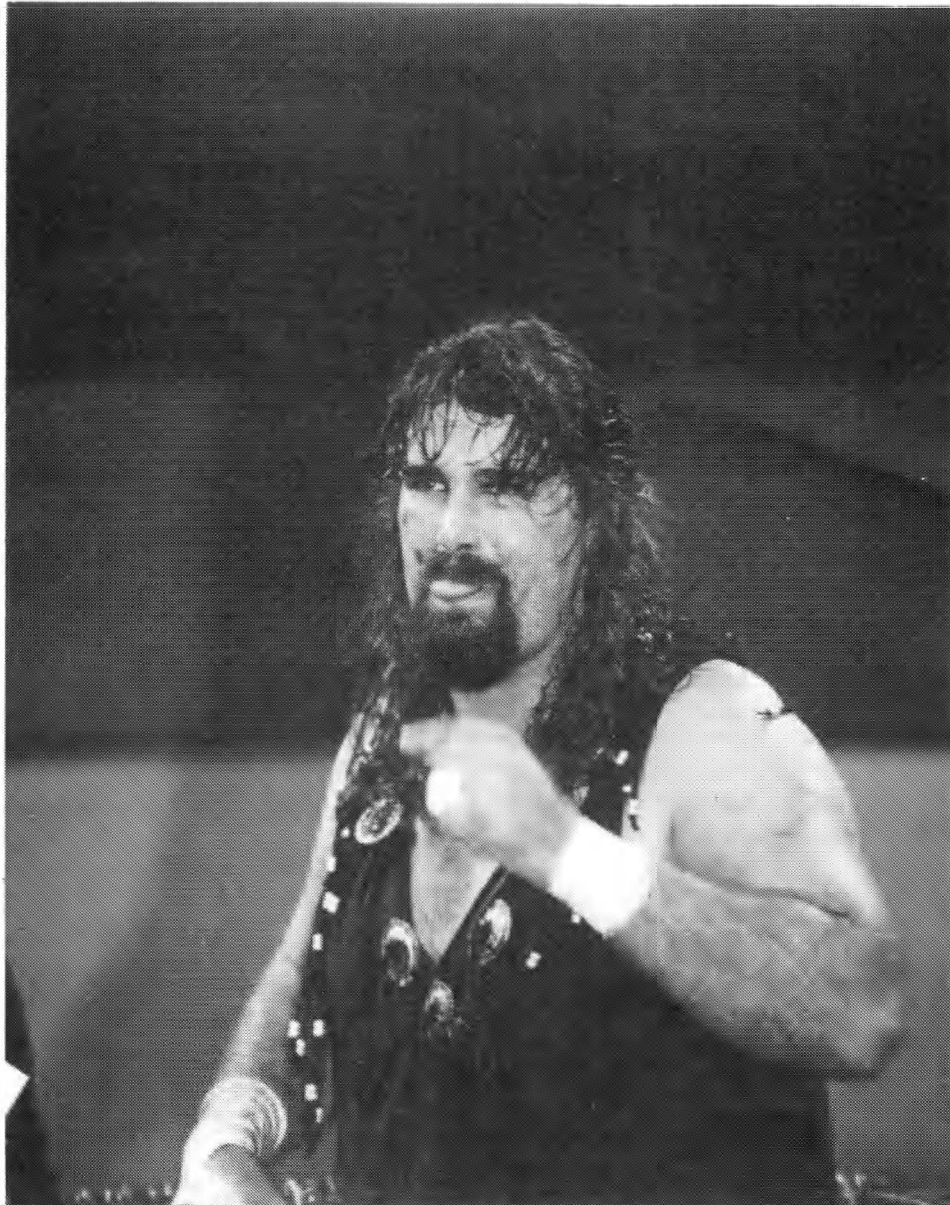
We have seen wrestling become the focal point for its own spinoffs in *AMERICAN GLADIATORS*, *THE GRUDGE MATCH*, and the forthcoming *KNIGHTS AND WARRIORS* (produced, ironically enough, by Lawrence Welk Jr.). The term "crash television," now an entry in the television vocabulary, had its roots in wrestling.

Just as television soap operas spawned their own independently-published newsletters, as college football boasts its bulletins for obsessive fans determined to follow every step of high school stars before their university signings, and as Rudy Martzke has become in *USA TODAY* to television sports what Chef Boy-ar-Dee is to canned spaghetti, so has the wrestling newsletter become a narrowly-followed, yet distinctive, portion of the mat landscape.

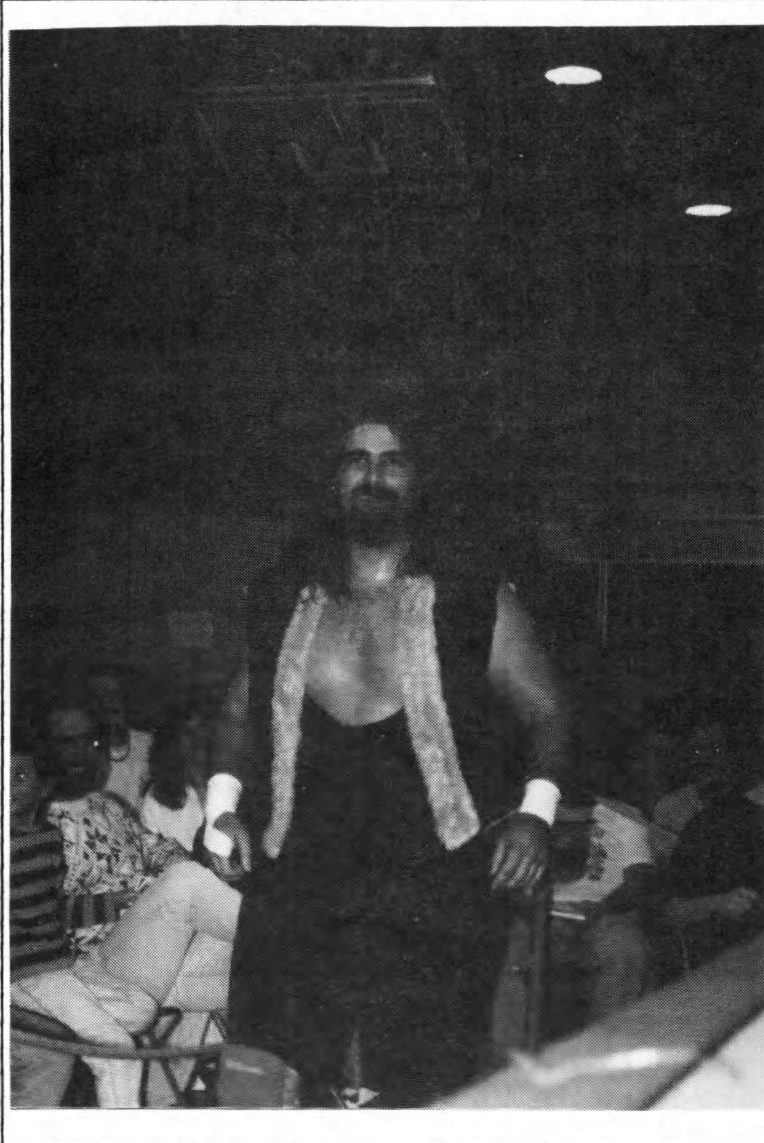
We've enjoyed being part of this journey for the last four years and having you along with us. Hopefully, this retrospective of 1991 and memorable moments of the years before will touch you in a special way.

Steve Beverly

MATWATCH Man Of the Year



Cactus Jack



When I first heard of the exploits of The Man of a Thousand Bumps, he was appearing in the Northeast in high school auditoriums and small, grimy gyms as Cactus Jack Foley, attaching his birth surname to a bizarre character independent fans knew would become a star.

For those of us in the South, the only way to follow the career of Cactus in detail was often through John Lanigan's incidental results bulletins after his explicit food reports from assorted concessionaires.

Michael Foley and I finally communicated shortly after his premiere with Jerry Jarrett's World Class group before it was rechristened USWA.

It was 1989 and after six or seven weeks, I knew he was being watched closely by the folks in Ted Turner's camp. Shortly after Jim Ross took over as chairman of the first of several NWA booking committees, he told me, "We could take somebody like Cactus Jack and build him into the kind of character that you don't have to put a belt on for him to be a star. He's made in the mold of (Bruiser) Brody." I didn't tell Cactus of the latter comment but advised him he'd

probably be hearing from Atlanta soon.

Early on, I learned Cactus had a broadcasting background and that led to an instant camaraderie. He had majored in communications in college (I just don't know if they taught Bang Bang 101) and he was interested in how his interviews came across on the air. "What do you think I ought to be doing?" he asked. I advised him to continue just like he was and build his character slowly and subtly because the overly-boisterous, loud interview had become a cliché and if he was trying to develop a "crazy man" character, he had to be cautious not to smother the viewer with too much too soon. He agreed. But he wasn't happy with one aspect Jarrett had added to his character: the last name Manson (à la Charles). "My mother's not particularly happy about that," said Cactus. "Particularly when people see me on TV who know our family." But he endured it.

Once, I was critical of a music video featuring him and others in the Stud Stable because it went an endless seven-and-a-half minutes. "What show did you see?" he asked. "I thought it was a great and it was only three minutes long." As it turned out, the version in our area was different from the briefer one which aired in Texas.

Soon, I discovered this 24-year-old from Seatucket, N.Y., was refreshingly different from many in the mat game. He was a true student of wrestling and had an inquisitive mind. As one of his final projects in college, he produced a documentary on the Dominic DeNucci School of Wrestling, the place where he trained. Using a virtual cinema verite technique, the half-hour piece was strong enough that, had it enough funding to add first-class lighting, it could have been PBS quality.

He went through the Jarrett school of Dallas and Memphis low on pay but long on brutality. Robert Fuller liked his work well enough that when he returned to Alabama to book the waning days of the Continental Wrestling Federation for David Woods, he took Cactus along. Again, the money was poor as Woods was running out of funding from his Colonial Bank loan. One Monday evening after a taping in Montgomery, Cactus called to let me know how things were going and suddenly had to depart. "We've been invited to come over for some free food tonight," said Cactus. "On our salary, anytime anyone says the meal is free, I go."

In the fall of 1989, the call from Atlanta did come. Ric Flair had become booker for World Championship Wrestling but Ross had continued to lobby for Cactus to be imported. "They're not sure what they want to do with me," said Cactus, "but they've asked me to come in for a tryout at the Center Stage." There was no doubt in my mind he'd make it, unless politics blocked him.

Still, his was a character which could not be too quickly pushed. The early Cactus gimmick was to team him with jobbers who would be summarily pinned and the "unstable" Cactus (who still had the Manson moniker during his first WCW tour) would promptly blow up at his losing partner and deliver that monstrous hipbuster from the ring apron to the floor. Lanigan once wrote a note on one of his bulletins to me: "Now you know what we've been talking about up here with Cactus. You'll see bumps like you've never seen before."

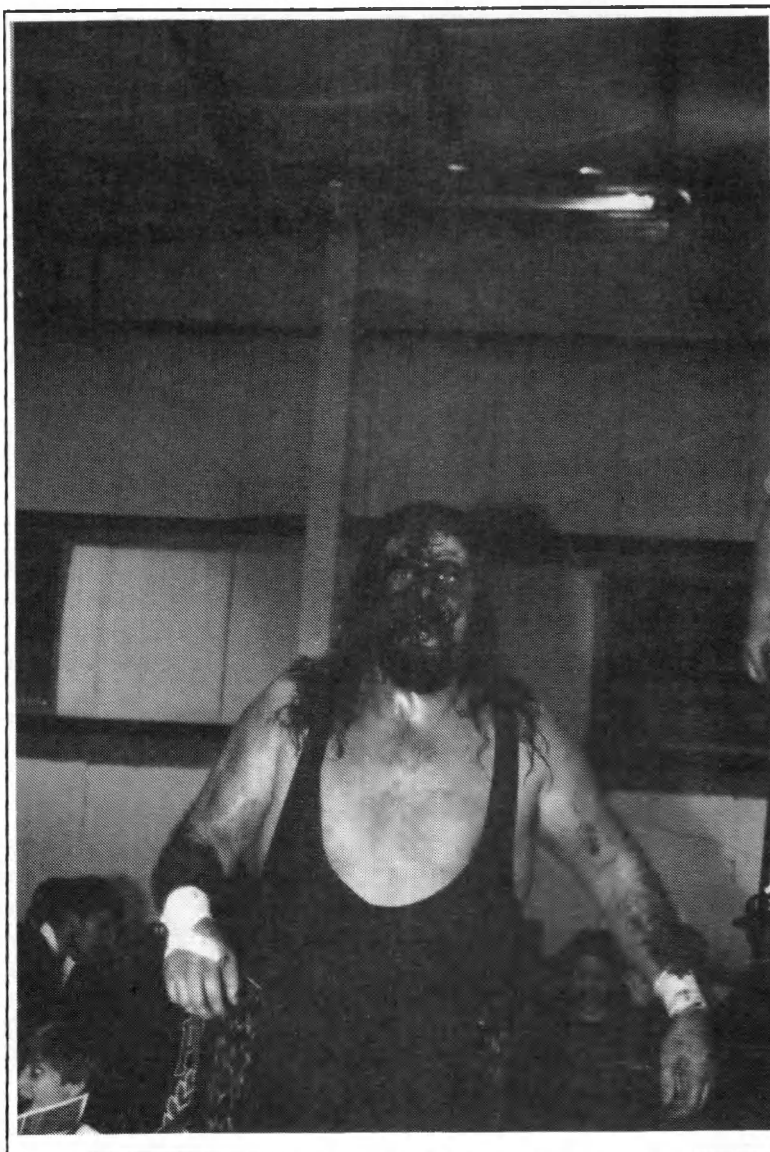
Eventually, Cactus worked into a program against Norman (Mike Shaw)---which was a natural matchup between two similar characters. But the first time he genuinely rang the bell on national television was at the *TEXAS SHOOTOUT* special on TBS in February 1990. Color commentator Jim Cornette had already set the stage with the line, "It'd be a psychiatrist's dream to have Rick Steiner, Cactus Jack and Buzz Sawyer all outside in the waiting room." Michael Hayes added: "He's kinda like getting a flat tire and going to have your oil checked." Cactus was placed in a bout designed strictly to put over the 50-year-old Mil Mascaras in front of the Corpus Christi fans. But Cactus made the most of it. Two-and-a-half minutes into the match, he took a devastating over-the-top backflip bump and landed squarely on the back of his head. Anyone who watches a tape of that event chimes in with the collective "oooooooooh" of the fans.

After the commercial break, Cactus became involved in one of the most comical moments in the history of WCW. A rock band was hired to actually sing the "Theme from World Championship Wrestling." The lyricist was never named (I presume he was being protected from a lawsuit). Cactus had continued to parade around after the Mascaras match in front of the band, holding his ears and going into that trademark maniacal stare. Finally, Cactus went after the lead guitarist, when out came former wrestler J.T. Thomas, the band's drummer, who began brawling with Cactus down the aisle. It capped an evening of memorable moments, which included Sting's ligament injury and Norman defeating Kevin Sullivan in the toilet.

The evening also brought Cactus attention from Japanese promoters. They were so impressed with his head-first bump, they were ready for him to make a trip to the Orient. But ever the loyal one, Cactus was determined to make a go of his first genuine shot at national exposure. It was on to Greensboro and his first pay-per-view date, against Shaw in *WRESTLE WAR II*.

The match with Shaw was surprisingly lackluster, particularly in crowd reaction. Shaw's Norman had just turned fan favorite and was being built as the cuddly teddy-bear for kids. Perhaps that's why the match was relatively quiet. Not enough had developed in the preliminaries to intensify the confrontation into something personal. Both Shaw and Cactus tried and Jack took some enormous crashes in the 13 minutes—enough to get Terry Funk's notice.

What impressed many fans with Cactus was his demeanor with them at Holiday Inn in Greensboro immediately after the show. A host of the out-of-town travelers to the show flocked around him. Grown men were complimenting him on his ring work. Children were asking for his autograph. It was the first evening Cactus and I had a chance for a face-to-face conversation and we spent about 45 minutes together. I marveled at the young man's sincere innocence when, after giving a seven-year-old girl an autograph, he asked: "Do you think I should be doing this?" He truly wanted to be with people but he was also concerned about cultivating his heel image. About 15 minutes later, at the hotel lounge where heels and faces were gathered for one of the most open exchanges I've ever seen WCW competitors have with fans, Cactus asked me again: "Should I be out here?"



The next day, I was heading for Rock Hill, S.C., where I was in line for a college teaching job and Cactus was more interested in talking to me about that than about the ring. It was refreshing. For some reason, he respected me and was concerned because we had conversed several times about my discontent with the situation I had been in for four years at Auburn University. "You've got to get yourself where you can be happy," he told me. "We need you healthy to keep MATWATCH going." I didn't get the job but Cactus, like many others, assured me the right thing would develop. I wondered but plugged ahead.

Slightly more than two months later, I would be in Jackson TN, back as a television news director, and Cactus would be out of a job. Neither one of us had received a fair shake. I allowed myself to be totally misled about the situation at WBBJ-TV and a new booker was hired at World Championship Wrestling, who: a)

was the most shocking choice of insiders who had hoped for a contemporary and innovative approach to wrestling; and 2) immediately told his troops the clock had turned back to 1974 and what worked then would work now. And he began a campaign to bring back as many of the people as were in Georgia between 1975-80. Ole Anderson was his name and he didn't particularly care for anything young.

One person Ole had trouble with right off the bat was Cactus Jack. Nothing personal, mind you, as Anderson told me in a surprise telephone call 18 months later. But he didn't like the high-risk Cactus style, the spectacular bumps, or his character (never mind how many times Ole had used Abdullah the Butcher in the 1970s). Anderson cringed at the head bump Cactus took at *TEXAS SHOOTOUT*, insisting Jack was "exposing the business."

On the first taping after Anderson became booker, Cactus was scheduled to wrestle Rocky King. But Ole came in the ring to introduce the angle which began the ill-fated Ric Flair-Junkyard Dog race-bait storyline, a trigger to his old wars with Thunderbolt Patterson. Anderson crawled through the ringropes and said, in full view of the TV audience, "Cactus, why don't you just go take a powder, or something? I don't care. Just get out of my face." It was the closest thing to an on-air firing since Arthur Godfrey dumped Julius LaRosa (only you over 30 know what I mean by that). I watched as the camera followed Cactus out of the ring and I could tell by the look in his eyes, that textbook maniacal stare was not there. Cactus was truly as perplexed as were the fans and, frankly, was embarrassed.

Cactus continued for a few weeks in some stumble-bum matches relegated to the *POWER HOUR*. He then saw the handwriting and left WCW after a conversation with Anderson, in which the two disagreed over his future and Cactus came up with a humorous rejoinder comparing his career to Cathy Rigby's. Without an opening in the WWF, it was back to the independent route for Cactus, who jettisoned the Manson from his ring name.

He quickly became a favorite for Philadelphia-based promoter Joel Goodhart and New Jersey-based Dennis Corraluzzo. Goodhart's perpetual bloodbaths were tailor-made for Cactus--only the shows were filled with so much blood, some of Foley's work just appeared to be another bit of brutality on the evening.

Joe Pedicino stayed in contact. He knew Cactus could be a strong building block in any promotion and, believing he would be armed by huge financing from apparent Nigerian entrepreneur Olu Oleyami, Pedicino let Cactus know he wanted him as part of his Global Wrestling Federation. But Cactus kept his independent work steady, as the GWF plans stalled.

Finally, in June 1991, Global--albeit with a far smaller budget--finally launched and Cactus Jack was imported as a mainstay of the lead heel group, The Cartel, along with Shaw, Rip Rogers and Scott Anthony. Pedicino okayed Cactus to continue any outside work he wanted and with Anderson long gone and Dusty Rhodes now in charge of creative chores, WCW was again interested. Without signing a contract, Cactus was brought back for several TBS dates. Plus, he continued working for those Eastern independents who could afford him. During one July weekend, Cactus became probably the only wrestler in post-1984 mat history to appear on three first-run ring programs in the same weekend: Global's *MAJOR LEAGUE WRESTLING*, WCW's *WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING* and the Baltimore-based *UNIVERSAL INDEPENDENT WRESTLING*.

One Wednesday night, a critical call came around 11 p.m. It was Cactus. He knew I was a friend of both Pedicino and some at WCW. The Turner folks were putting on the squeeze for him to sign a contract for what would be the most lucrative deal of his career. Pedicino had pitched him a lesser (though respectable) money deal to stay with Global but with fewer work dates required. "I'm about to become a father," Cactus told me, "and I want to do what's best for my fiancée and my child. Joe's been real nice to me and the Turner people have been good." In

then-WCW executive vice president Jim Herd had told me, "When we first brought him back in here, he came up and asked me, 'Do I have a problem with you?' I told him, 'No. In fact, I always liked your work. The only reason, as far as I'm concerned that you were gone before is because Ole just didn't want you and I had to back my bookie.'" Pedicino had privately told me he had told Cactus what he had to offer and advised Foley to weigh it against WCW's deal and do what he felt was best for himself. "If he decides to go to WCW, there won't be any hard feelings," said Pedicino. "He's been a pro with us and I'm sure he'll continue to be. He knows he'll always have a place here." Cactus was genuinely concerned about upsetting Joe because he felt Pedicino had been very fair with him. I reassured him, "If Joe told you to do what you think is best, he meant it. He respects you and is not going to have any ill will."

Cactus took the WCW deal but not before a memorable Global match. Former Freebird Terry Gordy came in for the Global North American title tournament and confronted Cactus with a brutal 18-minute match which ended with Cactus taking a spinebuster on the floor for a countout loss. It would be tremendous preparation for his WCW launch.

Ric Flair's departure for the World Wrestling Federation was fortuitous timing for Foley. New WCW world champion Lex Luger would be in programs with Barry Windham and Ron Simmons, so the door was opened for Cactus to gain a showcase program with the top youth favorite in the Turner group, Sting. Frankly, Steve Borden's career needed a jolt. When WCW aborted his first world title reign after only seven months, Sting then dropped two close matches on pay-per-views, both where the fading Nikita Koloff was involved. Cactus was the right medicine.

At the time, WCW was at perhaps its most turbulent period of the three-year Turner stewardship. Herd was coming under increasing fire for the departure to the WWF or out of the company of WCW's major personalities, including the Road Warriors, Jim Cornette and Sid Vicious. The Flair swan song, in the midst of a bitter dispute between Herd and Flair's attorney, Dennis Guthrie, could have been a fate-sealer. Television ratings had sharply declined. Arena attendance and morale were at all-time lows.

The Cactus-Sting feud was launched in arenas before it had been heavily promoted on television. The two met in a series of bouts which often attracted crowds of three digits or barely more than a thousand, particularly on a summer West Coast swing. But Cactus and, to a like degree, Sting were reenergized. As long-time MATWATCH California correspondent Chris Crosby told us: "These two guys went at it like there were 10,000 people in the place. They put Luger and Ron Simmons in the fourth match on the card, for some odd reason, but Sting and Cactus put on a show for 20 minutes." Reports came in of the show-stealers night after night.

Accordingly, mouths dropped open when the 54-year-old Larry Shreeve was announced for his third WCW tour of the Turner era as Abdullah the Butcher. He would be part of the Sting-Cactus angle and, with Rick Steiner's brother Scott injured, Sting and Steiner would collide with Cactus and Abdullah in some cage and death matches around the horn. Abby had been classified as a long washed-up entity his last two trips in, largely because he had never been placed in a program to recreate some of his classic late '80s brawls with Brody.

Surprisingly, the styles of Cactus and Abby meshed. Rhodes reinstituted a less-than-successful *GREAT AMERICAN BASH* tour but the empty seats were not a result of the usual finales. Ron Lemieux reported from the Florida stops how the Cactus-Abby tag brawls were stealing the shows. "You could actually get excited about Abdullah again because he blends with Cactus so well," said Lemieux. "They brawled all over the building with Sting and Steiner in one place and everybody in

in the house was standing." While Cactus was on the losing ends of the bouts, he was not hurt at all by the outcomes; likely, he was enhanced because he was finally placed in a program where people could see his true strengths on a national basis. Some hardcore fans began calling him "the Brody of the '90s." In fact, on a recent *JIM ROSS SHOW*, Cactus told Ross how he had been booked for a match against Brody before Frank Goodish's senseless murder and when he arrived at the arena, the promoter told him he wasn't ready for Brody and was scrubbed from the bout. "That promoter never paid me, either," said Cactus. "I've never forgotten that or the fact that was the one match I was looking forward to more than any in my career because of what I would have learned."

The Sting-Cactus wars concluded with a 20-minute "submit or surrender" brawl on *WORLD WIDE WRESTLING* during the November rating sweeps. The event was as physical and brutal as the Turner organization will allow on a syndicated episode and Cactus took one bump completely over the security guard rail into the crowd. A check of the tape showed 23 Cactus-like bumps during the bout. *MATWATCH* rated the match the year's best on a weekly TV mat series.

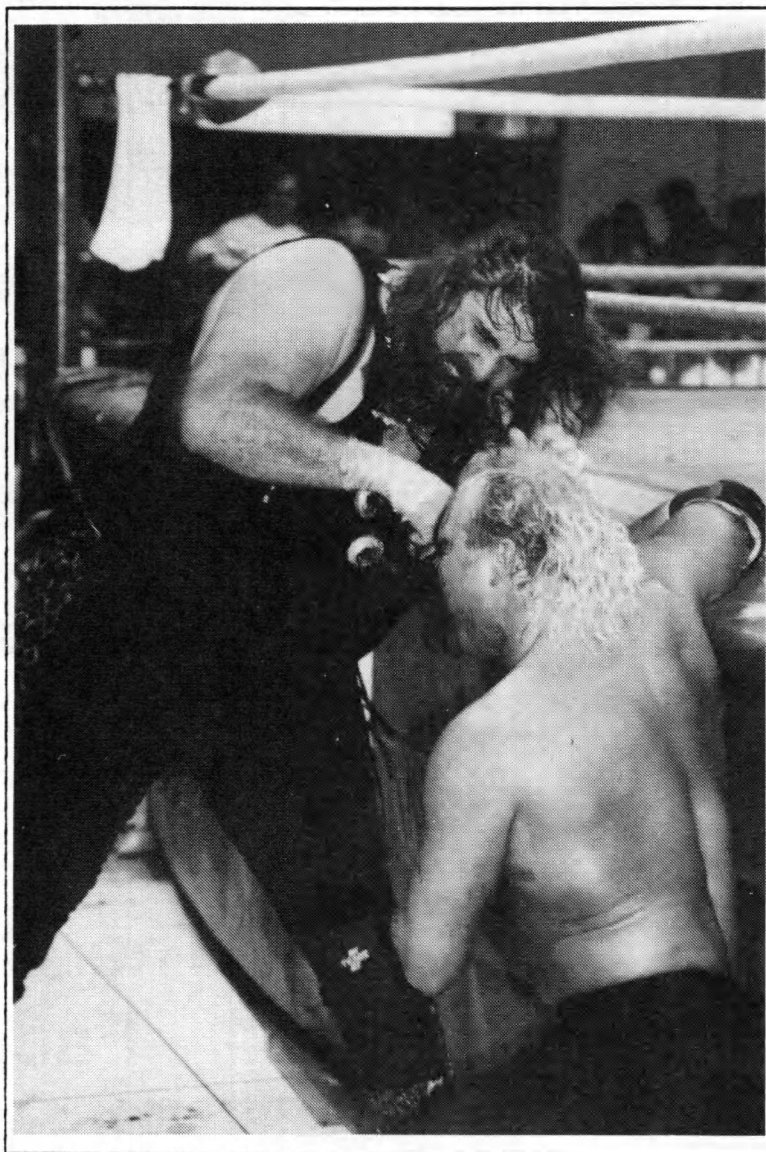
In a sense, the story of the match was not the culmination of the program. It was the textbook example of a man who never fails to give the best he has to offer, no matter the situation. "This guy wrestled one night before 350 people against Sting," said one *MATWATCH*er, "and he delivered the same kind of match he would have if there had been a full house. He hasn't forgotten his roots after wrestling in front of all of those small crowds in the Northeast."

In fact, Cactus once told me--in the midst of a lot of position-jockeying and backbiting among others during Flair's booking era--he was just happy to be there. "Hey, when you've been in my situation and spent a lot of nights hungry, you're just happy to be where you are. I like what I'm doing and I just want to do my job the best I know how," Cactus told me in Greensboro in February 1990.

Perhaps it is only mildly coincidental that a turnaround in weekly cable ratings on TBS occurred around the time Cactus, Ricky Steamboat and Rick Rude were all brought back to the group. But the refreshing element of Cactus' style and personality is that it is the same all-out effort night after night, no matter the city, no matter the number of fannies in seats. And though he could not have been happy about it, he even went through with a 40-second job for the rookie Van Hammer during an arena match early in their feud. Cactus was rewarded with a victory at the November *CLASH* over the same Hammer in the first of two TV bouts which showed how talented Cactus is at carrying a green performer who will work with him.

During 1991, Mick Foley made the most of the opportunities provided him. He never failed to give a top-quality performance, of which the only serious worry is how much the nightly pounding he takes will take out of him physically over the long haul. He honed his interviewing skills. With the help of the veteran Abdullah, he sharpened his brawling skills to a level which cannot help but attract people to arenas when structured with the right opponents. He did so at a time when his company was hemorrhaging. At 27, he has become consummate and is the precise definition of the word professional. Only internal politics, booker jealousies and his own physical condition can stop this man from reaching the top.

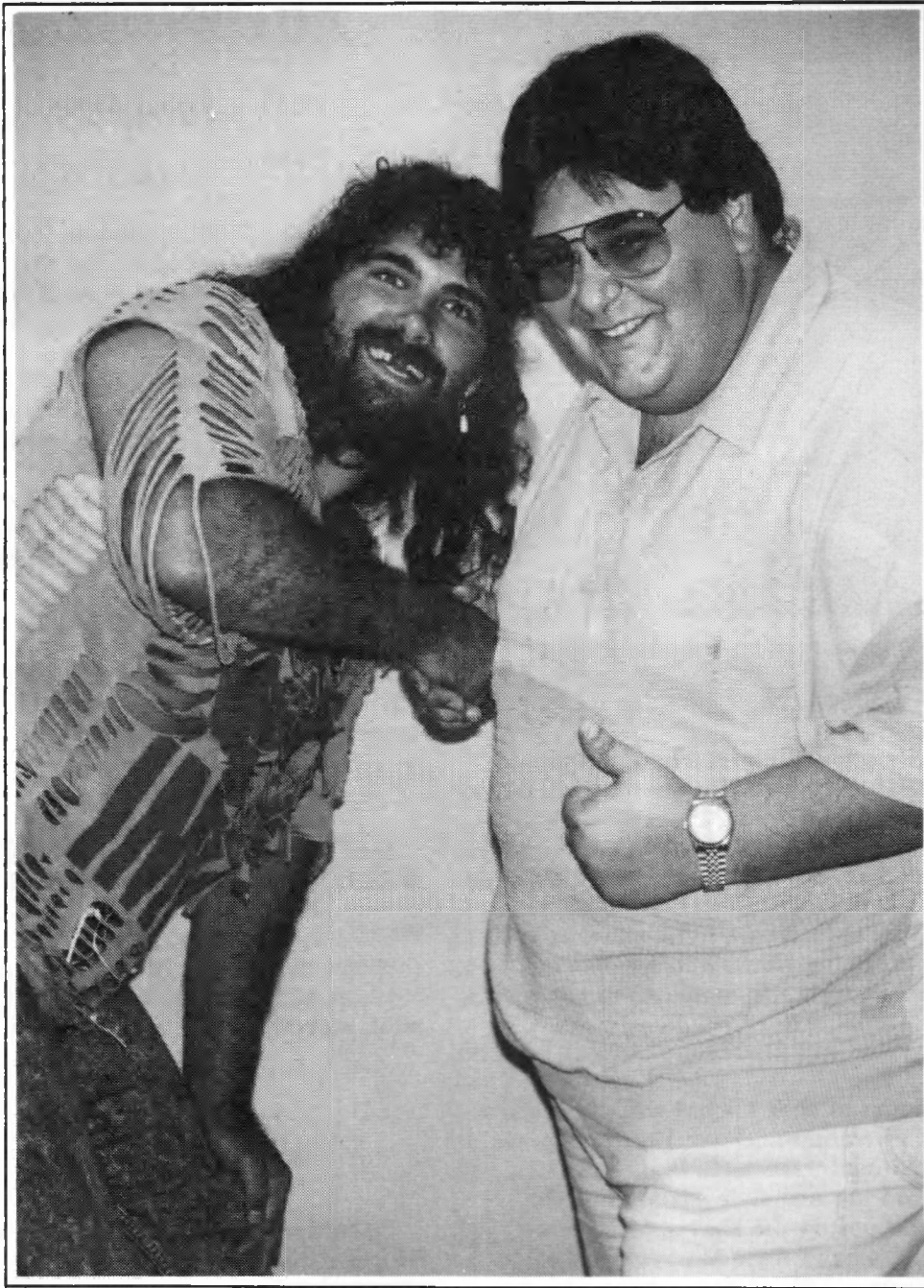
It is in this spirit that Cactus Jack joins Eddie Gilbert (1988), Terry Funk (1989) and the Wrestling TV Viewer (1990) as the *MATWATCH MAN OF THE YEAR*, the highest award given by this publication. Cactus was told of this award on John Arezzi's *PRO WRESTLING SPOTLIGHT* in January. He said, "This is kinda like This Is Your Life: Cactus Jack." Indeed, it is, and it would make Ralph Edwards very proud.



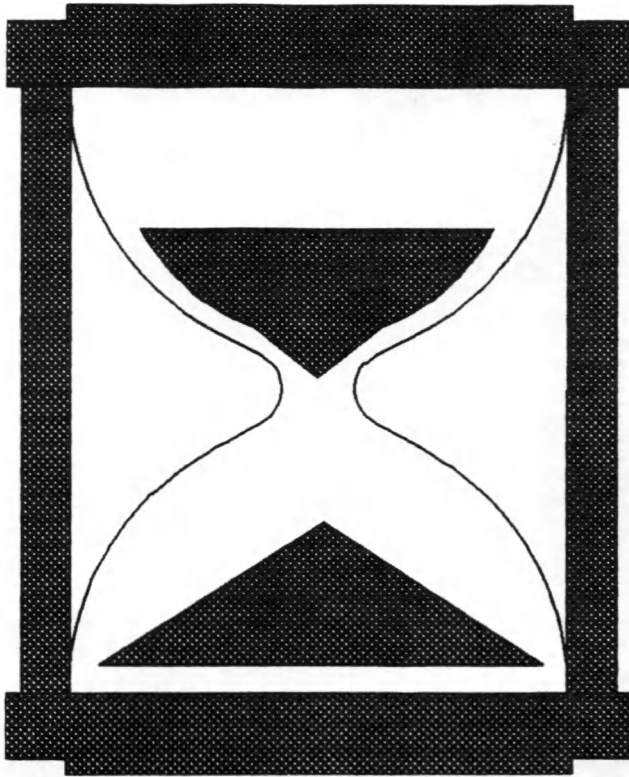
Cactus Jack vs. Eddie Gilbert



The Crimson Faces of Cactus Jack



Cactus Jack
Matwatch Man of the Year



Timeline '91

January

7-13

Olu Oleyami's Kongi Sports and Entertainment, headed by Joe Pedicino, revives stalled talks to purchase the USWA....Bobby Heenan charged with possession of controlled substances after collapsing on a plane in Tampa....Eddie Gilbert quits as USWA/Memphis booker....NBC agrees to Feb. 1 prime time WWF special after a tentative deal set to move the event to Fox....Ric Flair wins back NWA world title for seventh time in 20:38 over Sting at Meadowlands Jan. 11....Arn Anderson regains WCW TV title from Tom Zenk Jan. 7.

14-20

Persian Gulf War begins Jan. 16 and Vince McMahon immediately seizes on it for Sgt. Slaughter traitor angle to build WRESTLE-

28-31

TBS moves CLASH XIV from CNN Center to Gainesville GA after threats of security during Gulf War crisis....Mike Rotunda bolts WCW after being offered only a six-month contract extension....Mike Graham hired as road agent for WCW....ABC airs TAG TEAM pilot, starring Ventura and Roddy Piper.

MANIA. Slaughter defeats The Ultimate Warrior (with help from Randy Savage) to win WWF title at ROYAL RUMBLE Jan. 19....Hulk Hogan wins RUMBLE for second straight year....Ricky Steamboat signs two-year deal with Titan Sports....IWCCW financier Howard Rapp threatens USWA stations with lawsuit, contending Kevin and Kerry Von Erich still own rights to syndication time slots.

21-27

Joe Pedicino pitches Global wrestling show at NATPE convention....Jesse Ventura agrees to deal to co-host THE GRUDGE MATCH with Tim Brando and Lyle Alzado but the latter two do not do the show....Mike Shaw dropped as Norman from WCW....Dusty Rhodes rejoins WCW as booker and inserts himself as color commentator for CLASH and pay-per-view specials....Ric Flair and El Gigante begin feud....Jim Cornette continues to manage The Fabulous Ones in Memphis....Veteran promoter Nick Gulas dies at 76 in Nashville.

February

1-10

Titan Sports moves WRESTLEMANIA VII from L.A. Coliseum to Sports Arena after weak ticket sales and security threats....CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS XIV draws second-lowest rating (3.9) in the history of the specials. Combined rating of 5.6 for first-run and repeat showing was worst-ever....Randy Savage apparently to leave ring after match vs. The Ultimate Warrior at WRESTLEMANIA.

11-17

Ric Flair-Tatsumi Fujinami WCW world title rematch scheduled for Bayfront Center in St. Petersburg at SUPERBRAWL May 19.... WCW/New Japan Tokyo Dome show announced for \$9.95 pay-per-view price in April....Steve Prazak becomes Steven DeTruth on Atlanta's SUPERSTARS OF WRESTLING.Universal Independent Wrestling announced to start operation March 7 in Baltimore area.

18-24

Flair/Anderson/Barry Windham/Larry Zbyszko defeat Sting/Steiners/Brian Pillman in the War Games finale of WRESTLE WAR III in Phoenix. The Freebirds, now managed by "Big Daddy Dink," defeat DOOM to win the WCW world tag title....Six nights before WRESTLE WAR, the Freebirds lost the world tag belts (which they were yet to win) to the Steiner Brothers in matches taped for air March 25-26....Jim Herd agrees to a forum with newsletter editors Steve Beverly, Dave Meltzer and Wade Keller on April 27....Titan Sports announces plans for two \$5.95 HOT TICKET shows: THE HISTORY OF WRESTLEMANIA and HULK HOGAN: AN AMERICAN LEGEND....Terry Funk set for USWA title defense March 11 in Memphis.

25-28

Bob Costas withdraws from instant replay analysis on WRESTLEMANIA VII....E! THE ENTERTAINMENT CHANNEL and Atlanta's WXIA-TV prematurely report the engagement of Missy Hyatt to WONDER YEARS regular Jason Hervey....In a Nashville sports tabloid, former wrestler/promoter Ron Fuller declares: "Five years from now, there will only be one wrestling group in America and they probably won't be doing very well."

March

4-10

Buddy Landell fired from WCW, allegedly for blowing snot on a fan....Jerry Jarrett leaves the Mid-South Coliseum for the Pipkin

Building in Memphis after a dispute with coliseum officials....Roseanne and Tom Arnold withdraw from WRESTLEMANIA....Owen Hart debuts in WCW....WCW POWER HOUR sets all-time record Saturday morning rating with a 2.3 in 1.29 million homes.... MAT-WATCH profiled in THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL in Memphis. Jerry Lawler comments on newsletters in the same story: "I deny everything that's in them"....Verne Langdon adds the private collections of Bobby Heenan and Ivan Koloff to Slammers Wrestling Gym.

11-17

Sid Eudy reportedly asks \$350,000 annually to renew his WCW contract....Khoslow Vaziri signs to return to the WWF as Col. Mustafa.Eddie Mansfield, the former whistleblower on wrestling's inside secrets, announce plans to revive an indie promotion in Florida.... Butch Reed asks for 60-day leave of absence from WCW....Konnan loses mask in Lucha Libre battle against Perro Aguayo....Herd says WCW talent coordinators think Owen Hart is "too stoic" in his early matches for the group....Jerry Lawler regains USWA title from Terry Funk Mar. 11 after quick count from ref Jackie Fargo....El Grande Pistolero wins USWA light heavyweight title from Danny Davis....Michael Wallstreet (Mike Rotunda) profiled on INSIDE EDITION.

18-24

Hulk Hogan defeats Sgt. Slaughter in 20:25 to regain WWF title at WRESTLEMANIA VII in less-than-sellout L.A. Sports Arena....Randy Savage loses "retirement" match to the Ultimate Warrior but wife Liz comes to his aid after Sherri Martel attacks Randy after the loss....Nasty Boys win WWF tag title from Hart Foundation in 12:12....Ric Flair retains WCW world title before 64,000 at Egg Dome Mar. 21 in Tokyo when "groggy" ref Bill Alphonso rules Tatsumi Fujinami threw Flair over top rope after Fujinami scored apparent winning pin.... Steiners d. Hiroshi Hase and Kensuke Sasaki to become first team to simultaneously hold WCW world, U.S. and IWGP world tag titles.... Keiji Mutoh d. Sting after blowing green mist in Sting's eyes....Vince McMahon gets glowing six-page profile in SPORTS ILLUSTRATED.

25-31

Buy-rate for WRESTLEMANIA VII estimated at 2.8%, lowest-ever for the flagship Titan pay-per-view spectacle....Negotiations between Sid Vicious and WCW said to be at an impasse....Paul Heyman signs new one-year contract with WCW and Ron Simmons inks for another two years....Owen Hart leaves WCW after one-month stint....WMC-TV's *THE JERRY LAWLER SHOW* airs 400th episode....Jim Ross close to deal for Sunday night talk show with WSB-AM in Atlanta....Herb Abrams announces plans for a Buddy Rogers vs. Bruno Sammartino match on his planned UWF pay-per-view but neither Rogers, nor Sammartino, are aware of it....WWF tapings see Earthquake John Tenta aftershock Jake Roberts' snake Damien.

April

1-7

MATWATCH April Fool issue declares Vince McMahon will begin a full-time cable network called The Wrestling Channel, Paul Heyman will host a syndicated series called *DANGEROUS ASSIGNMENTS* and Jim Cornette will join the Pro Bowlers' Tour....Sid Vicious agrees to apparent \$500,000-a-year contract with an assurance of the WCW world belt during the Great American Bash....Titan Sports publicly inflates WM7 buy-rate figure to 6.1% with 820,000 buys....Paul E. Dangerously and Diamond Dallas Page appear on MTV's *DIAL MANIA BATTLE*....All-Japan Pro Wrestling shifted to a 1:30 a.m. time period....Scotty the Body (Scott Levy) and Doug Sommers agree to work for Georgia All-Star Wrestling....Scott Hudson joins Joe Pedicino as color commentator for Georgia All-Star....Former Alabama/Tennessee star Len Rossi declares in MATWATCH: "What little (wrestling) I watch has little art or science. I think what they've done is get in a position where they can't top themselves." Rossi and his son now run a health food store in suburban Nashville.

8-14

Sid Vicious dramatically reverses field on

staying with WCW, having not actually signed his contract. He tells Jim Herd he's going to the WWF one night after getting a major push at tapings in Columbus GA....Every WWF and WCW show dramatically drops in the cable ratings....The Discovery Channel runs "In Search of Santos" documentary on the legendary Lucha Libre grappler....Undertaker (Mark Callaway) attempts to seal The Ultimate Warrior in a coffin for more than three minutes on WWF SUPERSTARS.

15-21

Jerry Lawler takes 4-6 weeks off from USWA to rest muscle spasms in neck....Tom Zenk returns from minor bicep tear....NBC's *SATURDAY NIGHT'S MAIN EVENT* features Ultimate Warrior-Sgt. Slaughter main event....Johnny Ace suffers broken elbow in Japan match vs. Cactus Jack....Terri Power returns after injury to take on Judy Martin on Portland TV....Missy Hyatt KO's Paul E. Dangerously during WCW TV angle in which Paul sends phony emergency phone message to get Missy away from the mike.

22-28

Jim Herd declares on The Wrestling Hotline Sid Vicious will be given early release from contract the night after SUPERBRAWL II....Herd also pooh-poohs reports Dusty Rhodes will return to the ring....WCW debuts on KCAL in Los Angeles....Jim Cornette blasts Herd and WCW on WVEU-TV's *SATURDAY NIGHT SUPERSTARS*. Says Cornette: "The TBS executives are the ones who decided to sully the reputation of the Midnight Express. The guys in suits run the whole promotion. We weren't going to let them continue to put us on the first match at the Omni when we wrote the book on tag team wrestling"....Debut of *THE JIM ROSS SHOW* announced for June 2 on WSB -AM....Cornette rejects bid to return as WCW color commentator....Dino Bravo quits WWF, much to Scott Hudson's chagrin....Paul Neu debuts as P.N. News for WCW....Heidi Lee Morgan and Misty Blue Simmes split as America's Team in LPWA....WCW introduces "Stomp Collection" trading cards....Axl Rotten injures shoulder at UIW taping.

April 29-May 5

Steve Austin signs with WCW and will have a valet named Veronica....**PRIME TIME WRESTLING** and **WCW MAIN EVENT** tie for the top spot in first-quarter cable ratings at 2.8 but **WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING** falls to 2.6 from 3.2 of first quarter in 1990....Jeff Jarrett and referee Frank Morrell barely escape injury May 5 in fiery collision on I-40 in Jackson TN. Jarrett's car was smashed by another vehicle which went out of control....Rick Martel leaves Titan Sports....WCW plans to extend contracts to virtually all performing regulars....Scott Hall gets tryout for WCW as Diamond Stud....Steve Keirn goes to WWF....Brad Armstrong balks at becoming masked third Freebird, Fantasia, but later agrees to be masked Badstreet....Howls go up when Jim Herd orders a character, Oz (Kevin Nash), based on the "Wizard Of..." movie....WCW gains September slot on Texas superstation KTVT....South Atlantic suspends TV tapings....Van Earl Wright of CNN Sports premieres as voiceover announcer for WCW....**STARRCADE** awarded to Norfolk....Scotty the Body shaken up after May 4 auto accident in Atlanta.

6-12

Furor explodes when a two-page story in the supermarket tabloid **GLOBE** links The Ultimate Warrior (Jim Hellwig) to homosexuals and alleges the WWF kid hero has appeared in past porno movies....Ted Turner declares WCW is having "encouraging success" with pay-per-view wrestling in **ELECTRONIC MEDIA**....NBC cancels **SATURDAY NIGHT'S MAIN EVENT** after February prime time special draws only 6.8/11 Nielsen rating and most recent **SNME** only scores 7.2, well down from record of 11.6....Eric Embry defeats Jeff Jarrett for USWA Southern title in Dallas....Scotty the Body teams with Van Hammer, late of **SUNCOAST PRO**, in Georgia All-Star....Chris Walker and Fabian (Mark Bagwell) win Georgia tag title.

13-19

Ric Flair defeats Tatsumi Fujinami in 18:39 by holding trunks to retain WCW world title in May 19 main event of **SUPERBRAWL** in St.

Petersburg....Steiner Brothers defeat Sting and Lex Luger in one of top tag matches of year in 12:10 to retain WCW world tag title. Nikita Koloff decks Sting with chain to cost Sting & Luger the match....Bobby Eaton defeats Arn Anderson for WCW TV title....Other **SUPERBRAWL** highlights: resounding boos of Oz (Kevin Nash) in 28-second debut over Tim Parker and Sid Vicious loses to El Gigante in 2:13 in his WCW finale....Cactus Jack and Eddie Gilbert both injured at Joel Goodhart card in Philadelphia. Cactus collapses in dressing room after becoming entangled in wire during barbed-wire fence match with Gilbert. Eddie has to be treated for strained neck....Mark Merro debuts for WCW as Johnny B. Badd....Steve Keirn loses loser-leave-USWA match to Tom Prichard in order to go to WWF....TV cable wrestling ratings slipped to lowest mark in two years with **WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING** falling to a surprising 1.7, its first drop below the **POWER HOUR**.

20-26

Bruce Prichard (Brother Love) fired as producer from Titan Sports....**SUPERBRAWL** does estimated 1.1% buy-rate....On ESPN's **UP CLOSE**, writer Irv Muchnick describes Hulk Hogan as one "who has big muscles and almost no talent" and says the Ultimate Warrior "has no talent and probably couldn't do this interview for 30 seconds without blowing up"....Master Blaster and Tex Salenger attempt to suffocate Robert Fuller with plastic bag on USWA TV....Mike Enos and Wayne Bloom debut with WWF as Destruction Crew....WCW incensed at behavior of some hardcore insider fans at **SUPERBRAWL**, particularly "smart" comments yelled at ringside and allegedly obscene gesture before TV camera after Missy Hyatt segment....Herb Abrams' UWF **BEACH BRAWL** will be available to only 15% of the U.S. on pay-per-view....ESPN issues stern warning to Max Andrews about excessive blood and male-female confrontations booked by Eric Embry for USWA cable shows.

May 27-June 2

Several veterans refuse to appear in WWF

planned "Legends of Wrestling" event at Busch Stadium WRESTLEFEST in St. Louis.... Gordon Solie dropped as co-host of *WORLD WIDE WRESTLING*.... Road Warrior Hawk sidelined for seven weeks after surgery for a herniated disc.... Rick and Scott Steiner retain IWGP tag titles against Hase/Sasake in Osaka.... Tugboat (Fred Ottman) becomes heel Typhoon in WWF.... Eddie and Doug Gilbert face Tom Prichard and Eric Embry in Memphis.... Ken Patera stripped of UWA title.

3-9

Jim Herd dumps Dusty Rhodes as color commentator on pay-per-view and *CLASH* specials.... John Tolos takes over as manager of Curt Hennig and the Beverly Brothers in the role of Coach in the WWF.... A Florida appellate court grants Jake Roberts a new trial on a 1989 aggravated assault conviction.... Veteran insider fan Bruce Grummett and the Zajicek twins are ejected from a WWF show after wearing Ric Flair t-shirt to Lincoln NE card and hurling insults at Jim Duggan and Col Mustafa.... Steve Williams wins UWF TV title on pay-per-view show only seen in an estimated 780 homes.... Tito Santana to return to WWF in fall as The Matador.... Dick Slater and Dick Murdoch signed as the Hardliners for WCW.... Only 804 pay for Baltimore WCW show and 850 in Hammond IN.... Eddie Mansfield's IWF gets slot on Florida's Sunshine Network.

10-16

KNOXSVILLE, U.S.A., WCW's 15th *CLASH* special only draws a 3.9 rating and 6.7% share with the Ric Flair-Bobby Eaton main event only scoring a 4.3/7.... Max Andrews dumps Jerry Jarrett and USWA from ESPN syndication and signs on Joe Pedicino's long-delayed Global Wrestling Federation.... Reports begin to surface that Dusty Rhodes wants Flair out of the ring after the Great American Bash tour to join Jim Ross as color commentator on WCW.... Jeannie Clarke (Lady Blossom) replaces Veronica after just two weeks as Steve Austin's valet.... Tim Horner quits WCW.... WWF announces plans for a "wedding" of Randy Savage and Miss Elizabeth for *SUMMER SLAM*.... *WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING* drops to

perilous 1.6 rating and *POWER HOUR* falls to 1.3.

17-23

Steroid trial of Dr. George T. Zahorian II begins in Harrisburg PA. Terry Bollea (Hulk Hogan) is named in *THE NEW YORK TIMES* as one of four wrestlers receiving anabolic steroids from Zahorian but the count, one of 17 against Zahorian, is dropped by federal judge Joseph Caldwell.... Scott Steiner tears bicep and faces four months out of action.... Jim Herd gives Dusty Rhodes vote of confidence as booker, despite severe ratings drop.... Herd shocks insiders with comment on steroid trial, which involves WCW's Dan Spivey: "I believe people are oblivious to it. We don't test for it. We have always looked on it as we have alcohol abuse. We're dealing with professional adults. We don't test for alcohol either. The steroid---to align it with alcohol isn't quite correct. It's a hidden abuse, later in life.... a delayed deal. If these guys want to do it to themselves, that's their business.... A paid crowd of 2,300 at the Taj Majal watches the debut of Vince McMahon's World Bodybuilding Federation.... Bill Watts passes on bid to become short-term commissioner for Global.... Craig Johnson and Scott Hudson named Global announce team. Hudson takes over as play-by-play host of Georgia All-Star with Steven DeTruth (Steve Prazak) as heel analyst.

24-30

George T. Zahorian II convicted on 12 of 17 counts of illegally selling anabolic steroids.... MATWATCH celebrates third anniversary.... Inside source tells MATWATCH the Ric Flair-Lex Luger WCW world title match, scheduled for the Great American Bash pay-per-view, will likely not be held.... Former *LEARNING THE ROPES* star Lyle Alzado links his brain cancer to steroids and use of the Human Growth Hormone.... Larry Katz moves his Baltimore radio talkfest to more powerful WCAO-AM.

July 1-7

Ric Flair's attorney Dennis Guthrie and

WCW chief Jim Herd fail to reach agreement on a contract extension for Flair. The seven-time NWA/WCW world champion rejects plan to drop title to Barry Windham in Macon GA at TV taping two weeks before Great American Bash pay-per-view. Herd "wishes Flair well" in statement taped for July 6 WCW and playoff declared for Bash between Lex Luger and Windham to decide new champ....Premiere Global tapings draw 1,200 and 1,500 to Sportatorium. The Patriot (Del Wilkes) wins 24-man tournament as first Global TV champion....LPWA postpones tapings amid reports of financial woes....Ronald P. Gossett IV joins as color commentator on horrible *ALL-AMERICAN WRESTLING FEDERATION* show in Chattanooga....Tom Burke and Dan Reilly debut radio talkfest on WNNZ in Springfield MA....Dave Meltzer reviews mat steroid situation in Scorecard segment of *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED*.

8-14

Lex Luger defeats Barry Windham in 13:24 to win WCW world title at *THE GREAT AMERICAN BASH* July 14 and turns heel in the process amid chants of "we want Flair" from an angry Baltimore crowd....Also at the pay-per-view: Nikita Koloff upsets Sting in a Russian chain match and Rick Steiner defeats Arn Anderson and Paul E. Dangerously in a handicap match. Show considered worst pay-cable spectacular in WCW history....Vince McMahon defends his family's history and disputes he influences steroids or drug abuse in a *NEW YORK TIMES* "Backtalk" column....At least four major newspapers blast the WWF's alleged connections to steroids. Titan Sports announces "the most comprehensive steroid testing program in professional sports"....Roddy Piper films movie pilot, *LOVE FOR \$17.50*....Nick (Big Bully) Busich offered WWF tryout....Buddy Landell fired from Global after no-showing July 12 taping....Lightning Kid (Sean Waltham) wins Global light heavyweight tourney....Hulk Hogan denies he has ever used steroids more than three times for "medical reasons" on *THE ARSENIO HALL SHOW* in lackluster performance, in which he uses the prefacing word "basically" 22 times during interview. Says Hogan: "I'm not ashamed of anything I've done."

15-21

Jim Herd announces he's suspending relations with wrestling newsletters because "I'm tired of being beaten up all the time" and denies charges he asked Ric Flair to take massive pay cut during WCW negotiations....*BASH* draws 1.0% buy-rate, lowest-ever for a WCW show....John Arezzi plays gutsy exchange between himself and Vince McMahon at New York news conference on steroid testing program. Arezzi challenges why more of the "wrestling media" was not invited to the briefing. Arezzi was only able to enter under an assumed name....Jim Ross recovers from kidney stone attack and misses first WCW TV taping ever....Scotty the Body agrees to enter Global as Scott Anthony, The Palm Beach Gigolo.

22-28

PRIME TIME WRESTLING (2.6) and *ALL-AMERICAN WRESTLING* (2.5) win the second quarter cable ratings. *WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING* sinks to a 2.2, its lowest-ever quarterly average....Jack Petrik issues a directive to "get back to wrestling" on TBS shows after meeting at CNN Center....Chris Walker and Steve Simpson defeat Rip Rogers and Scott Anthony in July 27 finals of Global tag team tourney....A planned "Georgia Red Clay" mudbath match is scuttled from the Sept. 5 *CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS*....Declining crowds force Titan to cut back to a single show a night in the fall...."We want Flair" chants continue on WCW West Coast swing....In carbon copy of Savage-Liz WWF angle, Tony Anthony asks wife Kim to marry him on Memphis USWA show....WCW agrees to two-year, 44-date deal for the Center Stage in Atlanta after Global tries to spirit the building away for TV tapings....At Braves-Pirates game in Pittsburgh, fans hold up banner reading: "TBS: BRING BACK RIC FLAIR!"....Verne Langdon's Slammers Wrestling Gym featured on ABC and HBO.

July 29-August 4

Eddie Gilbert does not appear for return date with WCW after learning he will be used as a babyface....Jerry Lawler drops USWA title

to Awesome Kong July 29 in Memphis.... Retirement rumors resurface for Hulk Hogan.... Stories circulate that Bill Watts, Ole Anderson and Verne and Greg Gagne are all having conversations with TBS executives. Watts denies it. Anderson pushes the story along and the Gagnes are said to be in for a "courtesy call" on Jack Petrik and Jim Herd.... Bret Hart does interview with Intercontinental belt on WWF tapings and Virgil shown with Million Dollar Belt at same shows.... Jim Cornette and Stan Lane send a \$200 black wreath to WCW offices with a card attached: "Our deepest sympathies on the death of your promotion".... Dennis A. Brent announces on THE WRESTLING HOTLINE that WCW will initiate steroid testing. Jim Herd denies it.

5-11

Herb Abrams threatens to sue Global over its use of the Wet 'n' Wild tag team he claims to have copyrighted.... Vince McMahon has Bobby Heenan hold up Ric Flair's WCW title belt on WWF shows, claiming Flair "may be arriving" soon in the WWF.... The Patriot defeats Al Perez in the finals of the Global North American tournament.... Legendary Georgia wrestling announcer Ed Caprai recovers from surgery in Florida.... Tommy Rich arrested on marijuana possession charge in LaGrange GA.... WCW announces move of its New York show from WPIX to WCBS Sept. 21.... Tom Zenk/Dustin Rhodes/Big Josh win WCW six-man belts from Freebirds/Bradstreet.... WCW loses San Diego slot for fall but regains station in Memphis.... Jim Herd blows up at Miami-based columnist Alex Marvez for writing Herd is on the verge of being dumped.... McMahon invites newsletter editors and wrestling radio talk hosts to Titan headquarters for Aug. 22 confab.... Jerry Jarrett settles differences with Mid-South Coliseum and returns to building.

12-18

Major brouhaha develops between Jim Herd and MATWATCH over quote attributed to Herd suggesting Ric Flair was untruthful. Attorney Dennis Guthrie threatens a lawsuit against MATWATCH, which stands by the quote but reiterates it was not the intention of the publication itself to impugn Flair. Herd

insists the quote was off-the-record and never again talks to MATWATCH.... Alex Marvez stands by his story about Herd's job situation.... Patriots (Todd Champion and Curtis Thompson) win U.S. tag title from Freebirds Aug. 12.... Eddie Gilbert agrees to start with Global.... Nikita Koloff departs WCW in money dispute.... Bob Caudle becomes host of *SOUTH ATLANTIC PRO WRESTLING*.... Former grappler Frank Morgan found shot to death in front of a Las Vegas school Aug. 15.... Jerry Lawler regains USWA title from Awesome Kong.... WMC-TV moves USWA from traditional 11 a.m. slot to 10 a.m.... Paul E. Dangerously challenges New York radio insult king Howard Stern to a debate.... Kevin Sullivan canned from WCW, as of Aug. 31.... MATWATCH publisher Steve Beverly announces end of publication, effective Jan. 27, 1992.

19-26

Hulk Hogan and the Ultimate Warrior defeat Sgt. Slaughter/General Adnan/Col. Mustafa in the handicap main event of *SUMMER SLAM* in 12:53. Immediately after the show, Warrior is "indefinitely suspended" from the WWF for "unprofessional conduct" until the end of his contract Dec. 1.... Also at *SLAM*: Bret Hart defeats Curt Hennig for the Intercontinental title in 18:05; the Legion of Doom beat the Nasty Boys in 7:45 to become the first team ever to hold the WWF, NWA and AWA tag titles on separate occasions; and "Match Made in Heaven" of Randy Savage and Liz Hewlett-Poffo comes off without a hitch.... Titan Sports announces Comprehensive Drug Testing of Los Angeles to administer steroid tests.... Independent wrestler David Mosiur, known as Chief Thundermountain, is found dead.... Sting wins WCW U.S. title in one-night tourney at the Omni Aug. 25.... Lanny Poffo replaces John Tolos as manager of Beverly Brothers.... A memo to TBS programmers includes Jim Herd's long-promised team of The Hunchbacks as part of the Oct. 27 *HALLOWEEN HAVOC* but the team does not materialize.... Herb Abrams cancels UWF taping amid reports the promotion is near an end.... Global scores a 1.1 for its second two weeks on ESPN, highest daytime mat rating ever for the all-sports cable network.... Ex-wrestler Vivian Vachon killed in wreck.

Sept. 3-8

Curt Hennig forced out of action indefinitely from back injury....Global rating increases to 1.2 for third two weeks on ESPN....*SUMMER SLAM* buy-rate estimated at 2.6% (\$12.6 million gross)....Axl Rotten gets dark-match tryout with WCW....Kensuke Sasaki out indefinitely with injury....Jerry Lawler loses USWA title to Dragonmaster....Rick Carter begins *WRESTLING TALK* radio talkfest in Las Vegas....ESPN rejects Verne Gagne's bid to return with classic AWA matches....ESPN asks Global for 46 first-run shows in fourth quarter but Joe Pedicino says without program fees, that many shows will be too expensive to produce....Sept. 5 *CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS* draws lowest rating in history of the specials, a 3.7, with Lex Luger-Ron Simmons contract signing angle drawing the peak numbers at 4.3....Ric Flair officially signs a Titan Sports contract and his first match vs. Hulk Hogan is scheduled Oct. 25 in Oakland.

9-15

Chris Von Erich found dead at 20 near the family property in Texas Sept. 12. Von Erich, the fourth of six sons of Jack and Doris Adkisson to die in youth, apparently shot himself in the head....Lucha Libre wrestlers and referees strike over reported deal to air *EMLL* shows in prime time on Mexican TV....Florida House of Representatives schedules hearing Oct. 8 on possible regulation of wrestling in Sunshine State....Vince McMahon bashed with a chair during an Ottawa angle between Ric Flair and Roddy Piper....Jerry Lawler regains USWA title a seventh time from Dragonmaster....Wendi Richter defends her NWF "world" title against Candi Divine on Nebraska card....Bill Irwin turns babyface in Global....Jim Herd elected president of the National Wrestling Alliance in bizarre move to regain possession of Ric Flair's belt now being displayed on WWF TV.

16-22

Jim Crockett returns to active day-to-day work in the WCW office....Florida regulation hearings postponed to Nov. 5....*MATWATCH* begins eight-part series on the 50th

anniversary of wrestling on television....Tom Zenk arrested in Clayton County GA Sept. 19 on charges of simple battery and possession of marijuana and steroids....One-Man Gang fired from WCW for refusing to do a job for P.N. News....Billy Black and Joel Deaton axed from Georgia All-Star and Global after asking \$500 a show....Lucha Libre strike continues.

23-29

Tom Zenk posts \$36,000 bond on charges in Jonesboro GA....Vince McMahon leaks plans for back-to-back pay-per-view shows in successive weeks in late November and early December....Bam Bam Bigelow appears in stunt on new *CANDID CAMERA* series....Freezer Thompson gets first mild push for USWA....Tennessee AAWF group folds....Tor Berg obtains financing to keep LPWA going for at least one more taping....Danny Davis wins back USWA light heavyweight title....Vern Henderson and Gator Gilmore defeat Charlie Fields and Giant Outlaw to win Suncoast Pro Florida tag title.

Sept. 30-Oct. 6

Titan Sports lays off 26 workers because of budget shortfalls....Madusa Miceli hired for role as WCW wrestler and manager....*PRIME TIME WRESTLING* wins second straight quarterly cable ratings, taking the third quarter with a 2.7 average, down from its 3.0 in 1990....*MATWATCH* begins new large-type headline publication format....Eddie Gilbert wins Global TV title in six-man playoff Oct. 4, defeating The Handsome Stranger (Mark Bagwell) by disqualification in the finals....Dallas fans chant "Dus-ty, Dus-ty" at Randy Rhodes when he teams with Billy Joe Travis in Global match....Canada announced for first pay-per-view showing with November *SURVIVOR SERIES*....Negotiations may end Lucha Libre stalemate.

7-13

Paul E. Dangerously suspended Oct. 7 by Jim Herd for "philosophical differences, pending review." Dangerously (Paul Heyman) hires New York attorney Bruce Gold, who says, "Mr. Dangerously is distressed that, for

the second time, WCW is preventing him to do the job for which he was employed." Parties for each side deny the suspension is a publicity stunt....In a not-unrelated move, Eddie Gilbert calls John Arezzi's *PRO WRESTLING SPOTLIGHT* show and demands WCW president Jack Petrik to replace Jim Herd, saying, "We can't wait any longer, or there's not going to be any WCW around".... Gilbert, angered over Paul E.'s suspension, aborts a plan to win the USWA belt Oct. 8 from Jerry Lawler, blaming Lawler and Jerry Jarrett, along with Herd and WCW announcer Jim Ross for Paul E.'s suspension....WWF p.r. chief Steve Planamenta makes first-ever guest shot on *THE LARRY KATZ SHOW*....WCW begins a ratings resurgence, winning the cable race for the fourth straight week....Kerry Von Erich hospitalized near his Texas home....A planned joint WCW-USWA taping in Memphis, which would include a Lex Luger-Jerry Lawler "unification" title match is scuttled after the Paul E. flap....Florida indie wrestler Chris Proctor stabbed.

14-20

USWA owner Jerry Jarrett responds to previous week's charges by Eddie Gilbert. "They're his opinion and he's entitled to it.... Eddie Gilbert's accounts of the facts in this matter (the USWA-WCW-Paul E. Dangerously situation) are inaccurate. In fact, there is great disparity between his radio interview and reality"....Jim Herd will not respond to the Gilbert remarks and will not give an okay to Jim Ross to answer the charges....A "dump Herd" campaign begins on two wrestling computer bulletin boards....A Nov. 7 date set between Ric Flair and the NWA over possession rights to his now-dubbed "real" world title belt....Sid Justice out indefinitely from WWF with bicep tear....WCW announces "Battle Bowl" tournament for Dec. 29 *STARRCADE*....Jim Cornette reiterates no desire to return to WCW or go to the WWF on Cable Radio Network....Buddy Rogers squashes reports he's going to appear for Herb Abrams' UWF. On Arezzi's radio show, he says he's never met or spoken to Abrams.... Color commentators dropped for second time in two years from WCW broadcasts....Titan announces a Hulk Hogan-Undertaker rematch for Dec. 3 *TUESDAY IN TEXAS* PPV.

21-27

Paul E. Dangerously agrees to return to WCW after 20-day suspension and brings in Rick Rude as first element of the new Dangerous Alliance....Lex Luger defeats Ron Simmons two-out-of-three falls in 19:13 to retain the WCW world title at *HALLOWEEN HAVOC* in Chattanooga....Also on the pay-per-view: Brian Pillman defeats Richard Morton to win the first WCW light heavy-weight title in 12:43; Steve Austin goes to a 15-minute draw with Dustin Rhodes in a WCW TV title match; and the Enforcers defeat the Patriots to retain the WCW world tag title....WCW introduces "Reffer-Eye" Cam during Chamber of Horrors match, in which Abdullah the Butcher is "executed" in "electric chair"....Dangerously had, on Oct. 25, told his story to the New York media in a news conference at the China Club....Ricky Steamboat parts company from Titan Sports after getting virtually no WWF push in eight months and after refusing to do opening-match TV job....Hulk Hogan and Ric Flair draw 15,000 to their opening match in the Oakland Coliseum Oct. 25....Barry Windham breaks wrist in four places Oct. 22 at WCW TV taping....Sid Justice has surgery on torn bicep....Brad Armstrong debuts as Arachnaman....Flair tapes first face-to-face TV angle with Hogan, in which Undertaker sneak attacks Hulk with his urn....Flair says he's willing to part company with the "real" world title belt for \$50,200.

Oct. 28 - Nov. 3

ESPN renews *Global* for entire year of 1992....Former five-time NWA world tag team co-champion Gene Anderson dies at 58....The Handsome Stranger (Mark Bagwell) departs for WCW under his own name....In the wake of declining ratings, Vince McMahon reformats *PRIME TIME WRESTLING* from live audience comedy show to parody of *THE McLAUGHLIN GROUP*....Jushin Riger signed for Christmas week series in WCW....Dangerous Alliance adds Bobby Eaton, Arn Anderson, Larry Zbyszko and Steve Austin....Ric Flair-Roddy Piper match only draws 6,000 to Madison Square Garden....EMLL Lucha Libre strike continues into fifth week....Buy-rate for

HALLOWEEN HAVOC projected at 0.8%, lowest for any WCW show to date....Joel Goodhart, Kevin Sullivan and Luna Vachon consider indie swing through Florida....Ted Webb and Oliver Humperdink co-host new Florida ICW show which is yet to sign a TV outlet.

4-10

PRIME TIME WRESTLING scores worst-ever rating on USA Cable, a 1.9/2.7....Young Pistols (Tracy Smothers and Steve Armstrong) defeat Patriots for WCW U.S. tag belts in Gainesville GA....Mary Lou Gantner, mother of late wrestler Ed Gantner, tells a tragic tale of her son's deterioration and ultimate death from steroids to a committee of Florida lawmakers....Curt Hennig takes over for Bobby Heenan as ringside attendant for Ric Flair after Jim Cornette rejects bid to join WWF as Flair's manager....Sting defeats Cactus Jack in "submit or surrender" match on **WORLD WIDE WRESTLING**, considered top bout of year on weekly TV....The Gravedigger introduced in USWA as latest challenger to Jerry Lawler....Lucha Libre referee Gran Davies, 51, dies after a match in Mexico....As decoy, WWF contends Hulk Hogan will meet Ric Flair on **TUESDAY IN TEXAS** pay-per-view, which does not happen.

11-17

Syndicated columnist Alex Marvez and former WWWF champion Bruno Sammartino insist the WWF steroid testing program is "a sham" on **ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT**. WWF's Steve Planamenta says, "There are a lot of inaccuracies in that report"....Jim Ross goes on a five-day advance tour of London to promote British WCW swing with Johnny B. Badd and P.N. News....Sam Houston and Bull Pain begin Global feud....Chris Walker defects from Global to WWF....Scott Hudson opts to leave Global color commentary for editorial segment at the end of the year....Jeannie Clarke fired as Steve Austin's manager....Alexandra York also given walking papers at end of year....Nick Busich given release from Titan after encountering financial woes on the national tour....Dick the Bruiser (Dick Afflis) dies of internal bleeding after a weightlifting session Nov. 12. He was 62.

18-24

Ricky Steamboat agrees to WCW deal hours before **CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS** in Savannah GA and steals show as he and Dustin Rhodes defeat Arn Anderson and Larry Zbyszko to win WCW world tag team title....Rick Rude defeats Sting in 4:51 to win U.S. belt on same show after early show angle has Lex Luger attacking Sting's knee....Luger defeats Rick Steiner using his title belt to win in 11:30....Bill Eadie leaves Global as talent coordinator and executive producer when money runs out to pay him. Eddie Gilbert becomes chief booker....Teddy Long reportedly given pinkslip by WCW....**CLASH** rating rallies to 4.3/6.1, best in 14 months for the specials....**LARRY KATZ SHOW**, which features Freddie Blassie as Nov. 24 guest, to be dropped from WCAO-AM in January but will resurface on Baltimore's WITH-AM....Reports surface that WCW's Jim Crockett will return as general manager and Jim Herd will be shifted to a figurehead position....Curt Hennig announced as December replacement for Roddy Piper and Randy Savage on **WWF SUPERSTARS**....Steve Simpson loses Global tag title to John Tatum and Rod Price....Barry Horowitz begins calling himself "The Winner" after nabbing first-ever win on Global TV.

Nov. 25-Dec. 1

The Undertaker (Mark Callaway) defeats Hulk Hogan in 11:47 with help from Ric Flair to win WWF title at fifth annual **SURVIVOR SERIES**....WCW announces plans for seven pay-per-view shows in 1992....Titan Sports reveals plans to syndicate **BODYSTARS**, a series based on its World Bodybuilding Federation, for fall 1992....Fan tries to attack Jim Cornette at LPWA tapings in Jackson TN and Cornette has to be restrained by Joe Pedicino, ring announcer Ernest Harper, MATWATCH editor Steve Beverly and two LPWA production assistants....Lex Luger misses Nov. 25 WCW taping in reported anger over plan to drop Harley Race as his manager. Later, the incident is related to Luger's eventual request to be released from his WCW contract, which the Ted Turner-owned group agrees to in February....Dennis A. Brent slams newsletter editors in WCW arena program....

Dec. 2-8

Hulk Hogan wins back WWF world title at **THIS TUESDAY IN TEXAS** pay-per-view show in San Antonio, defeating the Undertaker in 13:10 by hurling the ashes from Paul Bearer's urn at 'Taker's. But Ric Flair, who comes to ringside, ostensibly to interfere, lifts WWF "president" Jack Tunney in time for Tunney to see the ashes....On the weekend's TV shows, Tunney strips Hogan of the WWF belt and declares the new champion will be the winner of the January **ROYAL RUMBLE**....Bret Hart defeated Steve Keirn to retain the I-C title at the pay-per-view and Randy Savage knocked off Jake Roberts in 6:46 but in a controversial post-match angle, Roberts slapped Savage's wife Liz and decked her across the ring. The angle was shown repeatedly on WWF cable and syndicated shows....KPTV in Portland announces the cancellation of Don Owen's **PORTLAND WRESTLING** after 34 years on local television. Reasons: rising production costs and declining ratings....**SURVIVOR SERIES** draws 1.8% buy-rate with **TUESDAY IN TEXAS** projected at an 0.9....A 74-page bill, including a requirement of mandatory steroid testing, is drafted for regulation of pro wrestling in Florida....Veteran former wrestler Ricky Gibson, brother of Robert, critically injured in Florida auto accident....Kimala wins USWA belt from Jerry Lawler.

9-15

Superstar Billy Graham and Dave Shults give interviews to TV's **INSIDE EDITION** charging Hulk Hogan openly with the taking of anabolic steroids....Controversy continues over an exchange between Ric Flair and the Nasty Boys at New York's China Club....American Wrestling Federation, organized by 19-year-old Gordon Scozzari, endures financial losses estimated at up to \$60,000 for its first weekend of cards....Hogan pins Genichiro Tenryu in Tokyo in a match where promoters had told Japanese journalists Tenryu would win. The situation forced several post-deadline headline changes....Mike Tenay and Rob Stowell move into second month of new syndicated radio series, **THE WRESTLING INSIDERS**, in Las Vegas....WCW United Kingdom tour draws heavily-papere

turnouts....Bruce Prichard signed to join Global as color commentator, playing himself....Jerry Lawler appears with legendary B.B. King in Memphis nightclub....WCW wins cable ratings for 11th time in 13 weeks.

16-22

Steiners vs. Hiroshi Hase/Kensuke Kasaki wins 1991 Matty award as top pay-per-view or cable special match. Sting vs. Cactus Jack from November on **WCW WORLD WIDE** named top weekly series match....Titan Sports' Steve Plamamenta says an impending **INSIDE EDITION** report is "pretty much Billy Graham calling Hulk (Hogan) a liar. It could be a publicity stunt for his ever-there lawsuit"....Chris Chavis and Chris Walker join WWF....Missy Hyatt and Jason Hervey make highly-personal remarks about relationship of Hyatt's ex-husband, Eddie Gilbert, and Madusa Miceli on **PRO WRESTLING SPOTLIGHT** in New York. Host John Arezzi apologizes to listeners the following week....South Atlantic Pro group attempts to enter TV syndication market....Roddy Piper makes surprise guest appearance on **PORTLAND WRESTLING** to offer tribute to promoter Don Owen.

23-31

Dr. George T. Zahorian sentenced to three years in prison for sale of illegal steroids....Sting defeats Lex Luger to win Battle Bowl in the finale of **STARRCADE** Dec. 29, shortly before Luger notifies WCW of his desire to leave the promotion before the March 1993 end of his contract....**PORTLAND WRESTLING** airs last episode on KPTV....**PRO WRESTLING SPOTLIGHT** moves to WEVD-AM, a 50,000-watter in New York. ...**THE LARRY KATZ SHOW** loses slot on WCAO-AM in Baltimore after station changes format. Larry will return in February to WITH-AM. ...The Dark Patriot (Doug Gilbert) "squirts ink" in the eye of The Patriot (Del Wilkes) to begin a post-January TV feud in Global....Jerry Lynn defeats The Lightning Kid (Sean Waltham) to win Global light heavyweight title....Jack Petrik announces WCW reaches agreement for multiyear renewal of Sting's contract.

A Personal Note, If You Please

*It May Be Gordon's Line, But It's
Appropriate for This Article*

By JON HORTON

Craig Johnson's Alter-Ego



A few months ago, I went home to my tenth high school reunion at Saint Stephen's and Saint Agnes School in Alexandria VA. When I left there in 1981, I had proclaimed I would be famous someday. My yearbook quote was from the song, "Fame." It ended with "baby, remember my name." The problem was: at my reunion, the most asked question was, "What do we call you now....Jon Horton or Craig Johnson?"

That question set me thinking of how I got into this whole mess anyway. The truth of the matter is I thought wrestling was going to be a part-time, for that matter, summertime thing. I had no idea back in May of 1990 when I first uttered the name Craig Johnson, that it would be the name most people know me as today. At the time, I was under contract to George Washington University to do college basketball. I believed the best thing, out of courtesy, was to change my name for wrestling. There was a small problem that winter. When basketball season arrived, I thought my wrestling career would be over. I was wrong. As I turned out, I was appearing on WFTY in Washington on the USWA Wednesday nights at 6. At the same time, I was appearing the night before on Home Team Sports hosting the

George Washington coaches' show as Jon Horton. The contrast was interesting. Jon Horton was less animated than Craig Johnson. I guess wrestling had its effect on me.

That led to the second most question I received: "How do you do wrestling? Do you follow a script?" Well, where have we heard that before? That also had me thinking....what are the differences between doing wrestling and "mainstream" sports?

My preparation for, let's say, a basketball game may take five or six hours. That includes making a spotting chart (a roster of each team) filled with statistics and facts about each player. In addition, I would receive the team's scouting report, which highlighted each player's strengths and weaknesses. From there, I would have to make up my scorebook, which includes even more facts. Although many play-by-play men have stat men at their sides for broadcasts, I always keep my own stats. That way, if there is a mistake, it's my mistake. From there, I watch video tapes, when available, of the opposing team. There is a lot of work to put in before the microphone goes on.

Then, there is wrestling. Name...height...weight...championship (if any). That was it. Sit down and put over whatever you thought was good. When I came to the sport, I believe I may have been a total shock to the system for some viewers. Marc Lowrance was regarded by many as bland and monotone. He would only get excited if he felt it was necessary. Even then, it seemed as though he came off as pre-determined in his excitement. I was excited just to be there. My basketball broadcasts always brought in the element of the fans. I wanted to do the same thing in wrestling. I wanted to be as excited as one of the fans might be to a particular match. It was genuine---not a put-on---as I am still truly a wrestling fan, at heart.

When the GWF started last summer, I wanted to bring a new dimension to wrestling commentary. I have to credit Joe Pedicino for allowing me to be me. As a basketball announcer, I love to use statistics and facts to tell about a game. In pro wrestling, promoters rarely allow for history. In the GWF, anything could go---and did. From the first match, fans of Global heard facts about wrestlers' pasts, including championships from other organizations. They heard how many years the wrestlers had been in the sport. They heard detailed sports backgrounds. And these descriptions were not limited to "pushed" guys.

My mom always said her biggest criticism on wrestling was it always appeared to be the same old thing. I agreed with her, to an extent. That is why I love the fact our *MAJOR LEAGUE WRESTLING* show looks more like a broadcast of mainstream sports than a wrestling show. My dream is to make a wrestling show look like the NFL or NBA. I am thankful Joe shares many of my views, although he does say I go overboard at times. But it is my philosophy that if I weren't overboard sometimes, no one would realize they are on the boat.

After the first few weeks, I was confident we were giving wrestling fans what they wanted. Unfortunately, in this business, the only instant criticism you get is from the "sheets." When I started in the USWA, I didn't even know about the sheets. As a matter of fact, I received a call from Wade Keller on my second night working. I had no idea who he was.

In 1990, I wanted to find out how I was doing from an independent source---not just someone who wanted to put me over. I called Boni Blackstone. Her number was on a list of contacts as her *SUPERSTARS OF WRESTLING* in Atlanta carried the USWA. In addition, I remembered she always read the fans' mail on *PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK*. She could at least give me an honest opinion. When I finally reached her, she said she enjoyed my work and felt I made a smooth transition between announcers. It was at that time I said, "Has Joe seen the show?" She responded with, "Why don't you ask him yourself?" Talk about marking out! "Is he there?" I asked. Next thing I remember, I was talking to "The Fans' Man." I appreciated his honesty about brushing up on some hold names. Little did I know I would be working for him a year later.

Boni once shared with me her reaction when I called: "I didn't know what you wanted out of Joe and me at the time. Why else would some announcer call us to ask, 'How am I doing?' Besides, that was about the time the Global rumors had started." The truth is, I had no idea about Global. I just wanted an opinion.

Now, the opinions come in by way of letters to the newsletters. I have read many positive comments but, unfortunately, more negative remarks about my "shouting." Funny, that is what people thought was great just a year earlier....the fact I was so excited. Oh, well. The people have to understand that, with me, what you hear and see is just plain old me. My personality is one of constant excitement. I see every show as a new challenge. I try to keep the facts rolling in but how do I keep you interested during an occasional lull in the show? Well, the "critics" have spoken but I won't change just for their sake. I will always be excited at a big moment. Besides, I found a new way to answer the "critics:" pay tribute to them on the show. If you ever watch a "best of" ESPN show, I sometimes will talk about a "viewer's request" match. When I do them, they are almost always a work, with the names being people to whom I want to send a message. If the request is for a face, I will use the name of one of my friends. If it is a heel, or, even better, someone everyone hates, I will use the name of one of the people who have taken shots at me. The best example is when Stephen Meyerson wrote a comment about liking Scott Hudson and hating my shouting. On a show, I said, "Stephen Meyerson of Brooklyn wanted to see his favorite tag team, Christopher Love and the PYTs. I guess there's no accounting for his taste!" Other times, we claimed Wade from Minneapolis and Dave from Campbell CA were dying to see Rasta the Voodooon. Both had taken shots at Rasta for being a dumb gimmick. The dedications to these people were just my way of letting them know, "I hear you. Thanks for mentioning me." The fact is: I take criticism with a grain of salt. I listen to those I look up to for advice, and take note of the others.

There are some things about wrestling I have found to be part of the game. You have to have a thick skin or you will get eaten up by this business. When I entered the sport, I thought everything was "neat." I was like a kid in FAO Schwartz! As time went on, I found many people had a different agenda. Getting themselves over seems to be the most important thing. I have been accused of this on many occasions (this article probably being one) but most of the time, it is unintentional. As the writer of the GWF arena programs, under my "shoot" name, I had no direction when I started. My intention was to get the GWF "over." Apparently, it came across as getting myself over. So, lesson learned. I tried to keep from mentioning Craig Johnson in a program again, except when "he" wrote a column.

Recently, I hooked up with an interactive computer service called Prodigy. This has given me direct input from fans across the country via the Sport Club. Every week, I ask for a report on that week's show. The feedback helps me get a perspective on what the "average" fan likes. The users are a cross-section of "marks" and "smarts." They are brutally honest at times, but that is very good.

As chronicled in MATWATCH, there was an interesting repartee between Andrew Goldberger (a teen fan from the Northeast) and myself with Joe Pedicino. I am listed on the member list as Jon Horton in Smyrna GA, not as Craig Johnson. When Goldberger said I was hiding something because I was on the GWF payroll, I laughed. I replied with a lengthy note about my philosophy of being honest with the fans. To that end, I told the board users they would know me better by the name Craig Johnson. Since that time, the E-Mail has been almost non-stop. Most of it has been positive, while others offer good criticism. I have enjoyed the one-to-one interaction with the fans. By the way, if you are a Prodigy user, you can E-Mail my ID---FFHR97A.

Luckily for me, I have the luxury of getting out of the wrestling world from time to time to work in other sports. This winter, I've had the opportunity to be the broadcaster of the Major Indoor Lacrosse League on Prime Network. Ironically, the league hired me because I am sometimes out-of-control hyper. I was their arena announcer in Baltimore. They allowed me to orchestrate crowd pops. If the crowd was quiet, I would get on the PA and say, "It's awfully QUIIIIIET in here!" That out-of-the-ordinary style is what I try to bring to all sports, including wrestling.

I never expected what would happen after this year's first game. It was a blowout with Detroit demolishing Pittsburgh. I felt I had done some good work, for a first game. The league

owners (who watched the game in a suite) said it provided the kind of energy they were looking for in an announcer. I was very happy with their feedback. Then, I got a call the next week from the coordinating producer at Prime Network. "We have a lot of concerns," he said. "We feel that your style does not have a place at Prime Network. When you did....public address announcing...." I wondered about that pause. After the third pause, I realized what was happening. They could not look past the fact that I was a sportscaster. They thought they were stuck with a professional wrestling announcer.

Eight years of hard work doing everything from high school football to Division I college basketball out the window. They thought I was a "wrestling" announcer. I pointed out I had spent almost a decade honing my skills as a sportscaster before I ever set foot in a wrestling arena to do a broadcast. If a network like Prime had hired me full-time, instead of seasonally, I would not have gone into the wrestling business. But the fact is: wrestling pays the bills. I would be happy to work with them to fit their style but I was doing just what the league asked me to do: give the broadcast energy. I was stuck, though. In wrestling terms, I was working like the "booker" asked me to, but the network says it doesn't want any high spots—just restholds. Interesting.

Luckily, my talent was proven on the next game. It seems I had a lot more supporters than detractors. Amazingly, I have not heard from Prime Network since—at least in a critical vein. So quick to criticize, but not to praise. It happens. It also brought a lot of support from good friends. It was a definite learning experience. Maturity does tend to come quickly in crisis situations.

As wrestling fans look back on 1991, I am sure I will have more votes in the "worst announcer" category here and in "most obnoxious" in Dave Meltzer's year-end awards but that won't bother me. If the everyday fan and the people in the business I respect enjoy my work, that is what is most important to me.

I hope to get back to football and basketball soon but right now, I am happy with wrestling as my focus. There are positives and negatives to both sides. The biggest positive in wrestling is there is no end to the season. The biggest positive to other sports is in not knowing what is going to happen. But in those sports, you don't get to meet people like Eddie Gilbert, Percy Pringle, Scott Anthony, Del Wilkes, Chris Walker, Scott Hudson, Joe Pedicino, Boni Blackstone and, yes, Jerry Jarrett. I have appreciated their friendship and advice.

I will miss MATWATCH. Joe says it is because Craig's Lines of the Week will go away. I say it's because it's the only place where Jon Horton can get a weekly idea of how we're doing on the TV show. Thanks, Steve, for being there and being a close friend. Enjoy your time off—but you will have no vacation from my midnight phone calls.



1

Vince McMahon Exploits Persian Gulf War in WWF

Not that it centered around any single event but a collective series of storylines, which actually began in fall 1990 as the U.S. buildup in the Persian Gulf began. Vince McMahon, ever the capitalist, attempted to exploit the potential war situation with the turn of perennial 1980s patriot Sgt. Slaughter into a sympathizer with Iraq. In one instance, Slaughter actually pointed a gun at the screen in a scare tactic against the "little Hulksters." The anti-American propaganda built to a crescendo when, in January 1991, Slaughter defeated (with help from Randy Savage) the Ultimate Warrior for the World Wrestling Federation title.

It was a story which wrestling fans either liked or hated, mostly detested, and was the crassest example of using television to build Hulk Hogan as a "superpatriot," with as commercial a display as ever of Hogan---in a carefully-crafted public relations campaign---posing at selected military bases before soldiers and their families. While more than 100 Americans were dying in the Gulf, McMahon was attempting to siphon a buck off their plight in a tasteless fashion and drew sharply-worded negative editorials from *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED*, *THE NATIONAL*, and *THE NEW YORK TIMES*, not to mention every major wrestling newsletter.

In a sense, McMahon received his comeuppance. The quick Allied victory in the Gulf severely diluted the Hogan-Slaughter tensions, leading to a weak main event for *WRESTLEMANIA*, the moving of the WWF flagship pay-per-view from the Los Angeles Coliseum to a less-than-sold out L.A. Sports Arena and a poor 2.8% buy-rate for the event from cable subscribers.

Through the television coverage, McMahon never apologized or even acknowledged he may have miscalculated on the public's tastes and even briefly resorted to using "The Stars and Stripes Forever" as the theme music for *SUPERSTARS OF WRESTLING* (which had been used as the musical intro decades earlier for Georgia's *LIVE ATLANTA WRESTLING*). Ironically, *SPORTS ILLUSTRATED* reversed its field the week before *WRESTLEMANIA* and offered a six-page puff profile on McMahon---including face-value buy-rate figures on past WWF pay-per-view wrestling events which listed some as drawing nearly a million subscribers.

2 *NBC Cancels "Saturday Night's Main Event" After Six Seasons*

After six years which began in 1985 with a pie-throwing finale on the eve of Mothers' Day between Cyndi Lauper and Roddy Piper and filtered through the "wedding" of Uncle Elmer (Stan Frazier), the near-deflation of Hulk Hogan by King Kong Bundy, the ascension of Jesse Ventura as America's most lovable heel commentator, and an eventual return of wrestling to network prime time after 33 years, NBC canceled *SATURDAY NIGHT'S MAIN EVENT*, the once-powerful, at one time monthly substitute for *SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE*, which once drew a late-night rating as high as 11.8 with a 31 per cent share of audience.

But the erosion of wrestling as a national TV novelty and the resurgence of *SNL* as a franchise performer for the network—coupled with the most important factor, declining ratings—led to the end of *SNME*. Ratings had fallen to a 7.2 for the Saturday specials (NBC only carried two in the 1990-91 series, as opposed to six in some past years) and an expansion to two prime-time hours in November 1990 and February 1991 bombed—the latter only drawing a 6.7 rating, well below the numbers for a figure skating special the week before.

Titan spokesman Steve Planamenta would say early this year, "That was a great relationship with NBC and we still are good friends with them but that series had run its course and it was time for it to end." But not for good. *SNME* would move to the upstart Fox network with a one-hour prime time Saturday night special in early February 1992.

Created by Dick Ebersol and Vince McMahon, the series spawned a live prime-time hour in February 1988, during which Andre the Giant "stole" the WWF title belt from Hulk Hogan, with the help of the infamous "twin referee" (Earl and Dave Hebner) angle and a three-count, even though Hogan lifted his shoulder on the count of one. Andre immediately presented the belt to Ted DiBiase, though the decision was overruled the following week.

3 *Ric Flair's WCW Departure And The "Real" World Title*

Veteran WCW/NWA hardcore fans will argue a case for this being the top story for the year and as a general news story, perhaps that is true. However, this was more a behind-the-scenes story and only secondary as a television story.

The long-feared, by TBS and traditional NWA enthusiasts, departure by Flair on July 1 from World Championship Wrestling, culminated a simmering feud between Flair's attorney Dennis Guthrie and WCW executive vice president Jim Herd. When a three-year extension on Flair's contract was negotiated in 1990, an "out" window in the deal gave Flair an escape clause if certain salary and job specifications were not detailed during 1991. Initial reports had WCW booker Dusty Rhodes wanting Flair out of the ring and into the broadcast booth after his summer Great American Bash tour. Additionally, sources told several newsletters—including *MATWATCH*—Flair was asked to take a salary reduction to \$350,000-a-year from 1992-94, a report Herd vehemently denied (WCW officials later insist they offered Flair an extension at his original \$15,000-a-week salary).

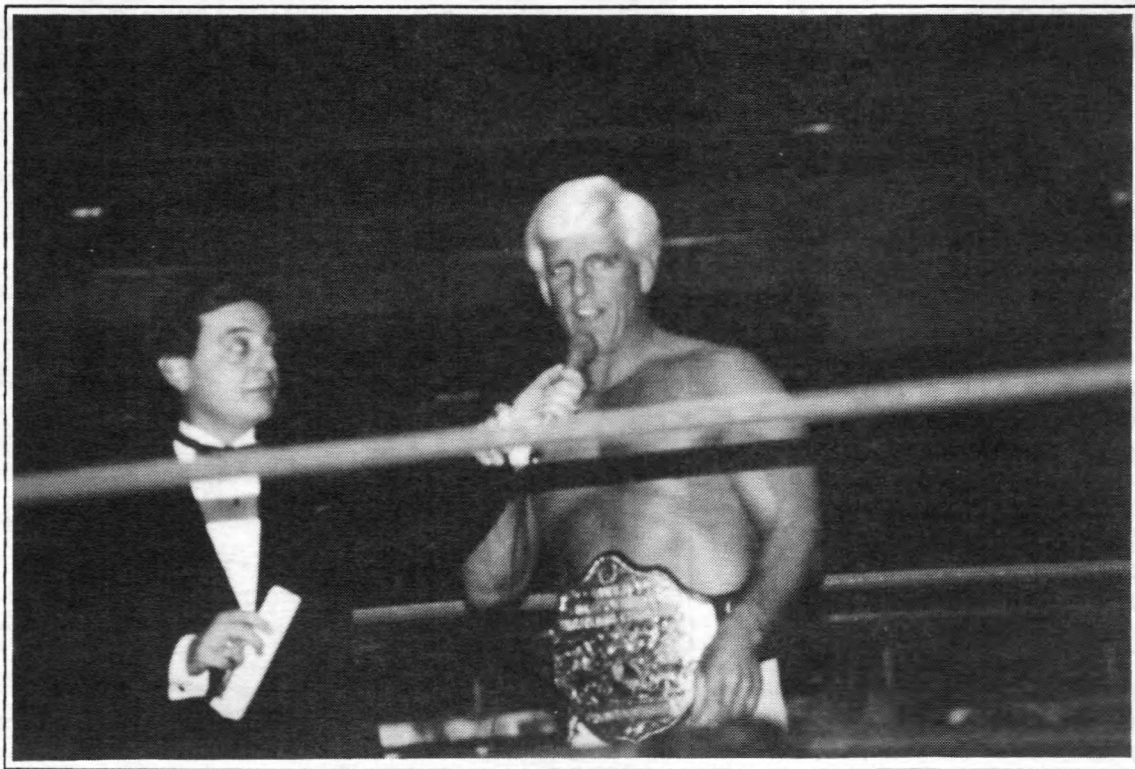
With negotiations at a stalemate on the verge of a Flair-Lex Luger title match at the pay-per-view edition of the Bash, both parties called off talks and that is where the TV element of the story begins. Flair was asked to drop the WCW world title to Barry Windham at a TV taping in Macon GA. scheduled for air July 6. As late as three hours before the taping, Herd acknowledged to *MATWATCH* the belt would go to Windham that evening. But Flair did not appear for the taping, setting up a much-criticized Luger-Windham playoff for the pay-cable show, two weeks hence. Reading from a statement approved by TBS attorneys, Herd

the parties had failed to reach agreement and wished "Ric Flair well in his future endeavors." The statement aired on the July 6 *WCW* episode.

Flair would be paid through Aug. 31 but the departure made for a critically-disastrous Bash special July 14 (see story 4). An effort to renegotiate with Flair as late as the day of the Baltimore cable spectacular, as acknowledged at the top of the special by Tony Schiavone, failed.

The next major television salvo was fired in mid-August when Bobby Heenan was inserted at the end of a *WWF SUPERSTARS OF WRESTLING* episode holding, ironically, the old NWA belt Flair had worn predominantly since 1986 (which never bore an NWA insignia, only a "world heavyweight wrestling champion" designation). Heenan acknowledged the belt "belongs to a man who currently is under contract to another association," a major statement, considering Vince McMahon's aversion to recognizing any other mat group since his early expansionist days in 1984 (when The Gladiator would be mentioned as a "former Florida champion").

The "tease" of Flair's arrival in the *WWF* would continue for four weeks until his debut on *PRIME TIME WRESTLING* the week after Labor Day on the USA Network. Flair would go on to an early feud with Roddy Piper and later cost Hulk Hogan the *WWF* title at *SURVIVOR SERIES* before winning the *WWF* belt in the 1992 *ROYAL RUMBLE*.



Less Than Happy Days Before the Departure

A Short-Haired Ric Flair with Gary Cappetta

4 "Great American Bash" *Lays Egg In Flairless WCW Pay-Per-View*

It was either the party no one wanted to attend—or, if they did, the one where they wanted to gripe. This one was jinxed from the get-go and has to be considered as a companion top story to the number three selection, considering the focus on the *BASH* in past years as a scene of major WCW title changes.

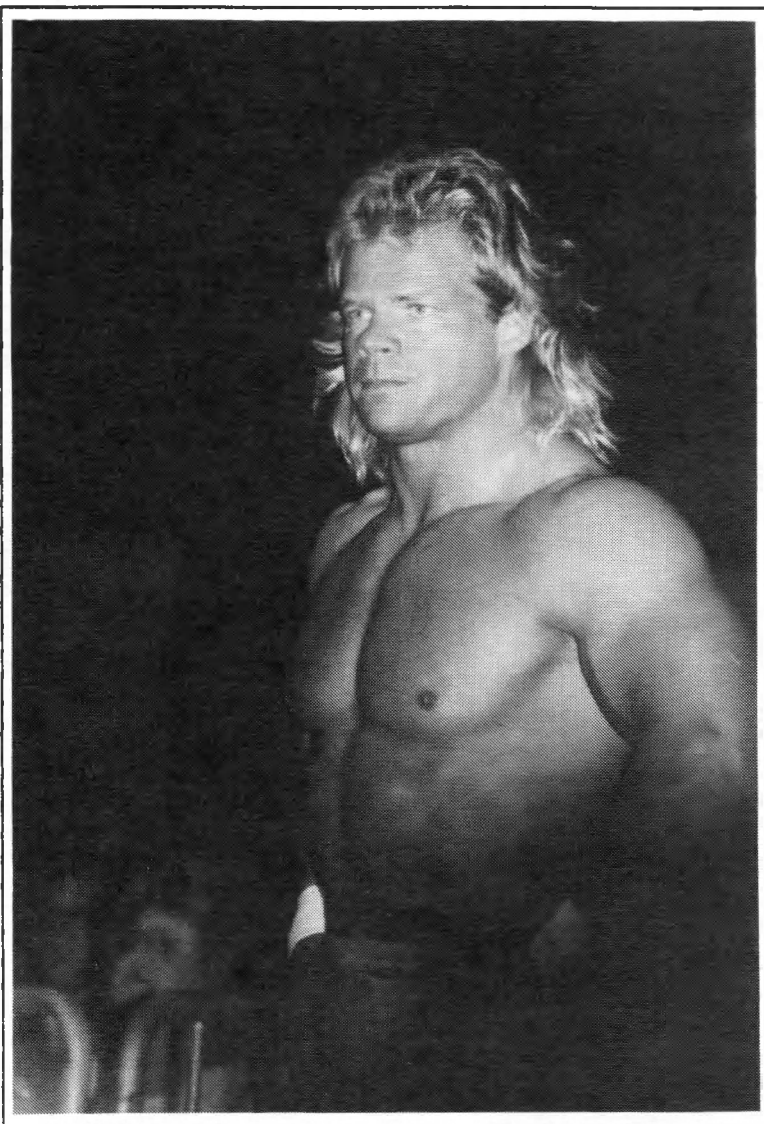
The cablecast began in embarrassing fashion with a pan of the Baltimore Arena crowd, many screaming, "We want Flair," just two weeks after negotiations ended for a contract extension between Ric Flair and World Championship Wrestling. The building was concurrently punctuated with banners demanding Flair's return. Not even Tony Schiavone could help with pre-show remarks that efforts as late as the day of the show to renegotiate with Flair failed. Whereas two-and-a-half years earlier, a Lex Luger-Barry Windham U.S. title match had been a shining light of the *CHI-TOWN RUMBLE* special, this time it was the match few wanted to see.

However, not even a spectacular Luger-Windham playoff to fill the vacated WCW throne could have helped this show. Beginning with a confusing Bobby Eaton/P.N. News vs. Terrence Taylor/Steve Austin scaffold match which even confused the announce team of Jim Ross and Schiavone as to when the Eaton/News team won the match (most past scaffold bouts ended when a grappler was thrown off the 20-foot scale but rules were altered here to allow a team to win by carrying a flag from one end of the scaffold to the other), the show was rockier than the Flintstones' house.

Ron Simmons was wasted in another futile attempt to get over Jim Herd's creation of Oz (Kevin Nash), which led to profuse booing.

Dusty Rhodes' Yellow Dog gimmick for Brian Pillman was weakened by a DQ finish and the inexperience of Johnny B. Badd (Mark Merro). Big Josh and Blackblood (Billy Jack Haynes) had what may have been the worst lumberjack match in history.

The El Gigante-One Man Gang bout only rivaled the Gigante-Sid Vicious *SUPERBRAWL* contest as perhaps the worst overall of the year between pushed competitors.



Nikita Koloff nosed out a victory over Sting, who had won the WCW world title over Flair in a comeback match at this event the previous year, in a poor Russian chain match. Inexplicably, in a promotion which still could boast of a youth favorite in Sting, booker Rhodes had placed Steve Borden on the losing side for three consecutive pay-per-view shows.

The Luger-Windham match was actually as well-wrestled as the two could do with a vehement crowd constantly chanting, "We want Flair," but what was arguably an unnecessary heel turn for Luger at the finale of the 13:24 victory with distractions by Curtis Hughes and Harley Race, left the live crowd and cable viewers puzzled.

Additionally, a long-promised Rick Steiner/Missy Hyatt vs. Arn Anderson/Paul E. Dangerously cage match had an edge taken off when Missy was "kidnaped" by Dick Slater and Dick Murdoch moments before the bout. WCW had apparently failed to note a Maryland State Athletic Commission ban on mixed matches and Herd ordered the angle to reduce the event to a handicap match, which Steiner won in 3:10.

The pall would not be permanent for WCW but the immediate result of Flair's departure was as bad a creative disaster as World Championship Wrestling has ever offered and a forgettable 1.0 per cent buy-rate, the lowest (until *HALLOWEEN HAVOC*) Turner Home Entertainment has ever registered for a mat event.

5 *WWF Attempts Consecutive PPV Shows In November, December*

Most observers contend wrestling's foray into pay-per-view cable television has been diluted by the same overexposure its initial national broadcast/cable mix created. However, the World Wrestling Federation took pay-cable into a new dimension in 1991.

The first-ever consecutive week series of pay shows saw the Thanksgiving week *SURVIVOR SERIES* followed six days later by a one-hour, 45-minute *TUESDAY IN TEXAS* show, programmed in most markets for a \$14.95 price tag. Originally announced as a non-sequel, the San Antonio special saw Hulk Hogan regain his WWF title (albeit using the ashes from the Paul Bearer's urn) from the Undertaker, who defeated Hogan for the belt the night before Thanksgiving with an assist from Ric Flair.

The results of back-to-back spectacles was mixed. *SURVIVOR*, scheduled on a night many families are traveling away from home, only scored an estimated 1.8 per cent buy rate of an estimated 17 million pay homes. The follow-up Texas show, while publicly announced as drawing a 1.2% figure, reportedly only attracted an 0.8% buy-in, according to independent cable estimates.

While Titan has not announced plans for a similar effort in 1992, both the WWF and WCW will carry five primary and two secondary pay shows in the current year, for a total of 14 between the two companies.

6 *ESPN Cancels USWA, Adopts New Global Wrestling Federation Series*

After a six-month stretch of false starts, Joe Pedicino's Global Wrestling Federation, boosted by syndicator Max Andrews' decision to drop distribution of Jerry Jarrett's USWA and an agreement by ESPN to pick up the GWF, finally launched on a combined cable/syndicated network in July.

Premiering with an ambitious four-tournament, 11-week series of broadcasts, Pedicino began Global with a grueling 42 first-run shows during the period, unprecedented for a Monday-through-Friday slot on national cable. In addition, Global inherited the old USWA syndicated network on more than 125 stations. The GWF *MAJOR LEAGUE WRESTLING* and *MAIN*

MAIN EVENTS series returned former USWA announcer Craig Johnson to the full-time play-by-play mike and introduced veteran newsletter hardcore (and good ol' Tifton GA boy) Scott Hudson to the national audience as color commentator. After a shaky early start where both were going for record mentions in Lines of the Week, the two settled down to a solid performance with Hudson becoming arguably the best new announcing talent in the U.S. in 1991. Another late-season addition was Hudson's fellow Georgia newsletter monitor, Steve Prazak as Steven DeTruth.

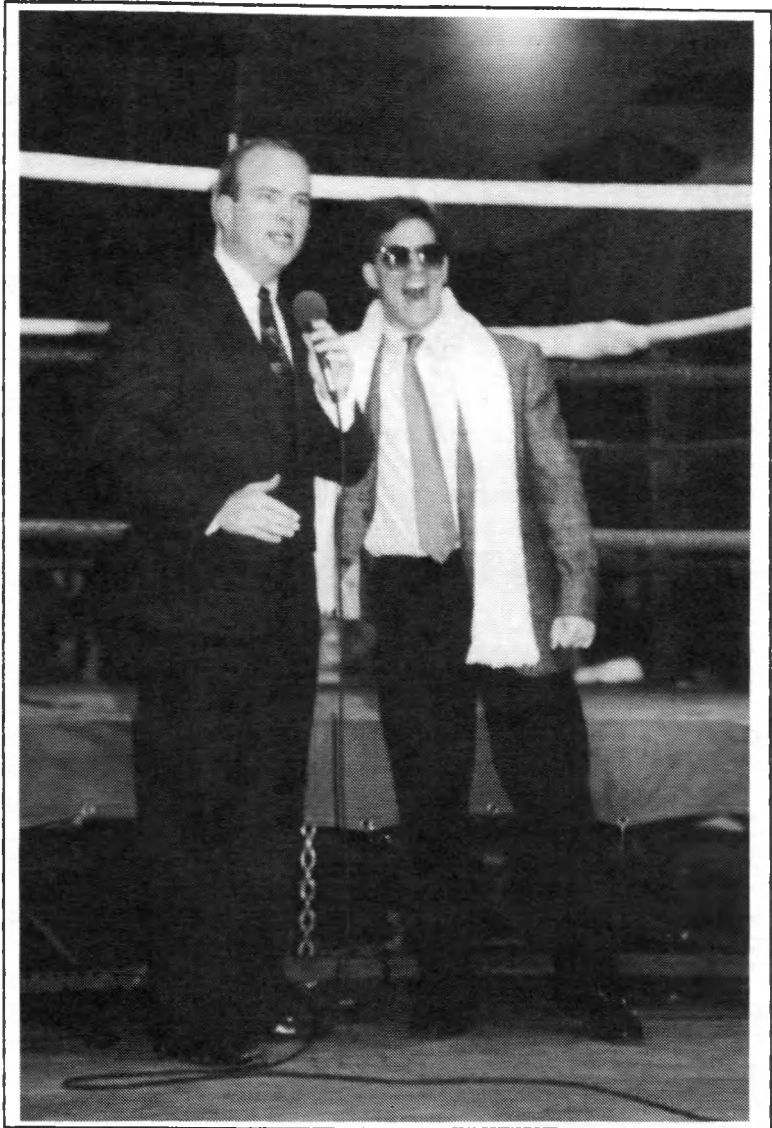
The initial central star for Global was The Patriot (Del Wilkes), a masked competitor who won both the GWF TV title and North American tourneys. Chris Walker and former World Class star Steve Simpson teamed to win the Global tag belts until Walker bolted for the WWF.

Pedicino also introduced a fast-action light heavyweight division (WCW would add one soon after), initially topped by the Lightning Kid (Sean Waltham) and later filled by Chaz Taylor and Jerry Lynn.

The initial Global creative chief, Bill Eadie, left the group in mid-autumn after GWF backers could not pay the former Demolition Ax's salary. Eadie was replaced as booker by veteran Eddie Gilbert, who beefed up the soap opera content of the weekly episodes.

Pedicino's wife, Boni Blackstone, was cast in one of the first situations in which a woman is consistently used as a professional announcer, not as a bimbo character, a la Missy Hyatt. Scott Levy as Scott Anthony was featured regularly on the color mike for comic relief and summer episodes featured Anthony, Mike Shaw (Makham Singh), Rip Rogers and Cactus Jack as the lead heel gang team of The Cartel.

Summer weekday ratings peaked at a 1.2 for Global, highest ever for daytime wrestling on ESPN. Syndication ratings fluctuated between a 3.4 and a 4.5 during most of the fall season. At year's end, Hudson opted to back off from biweekly travel to Dallas for a Point/Counterpoint segment with Prazak. Former WWF Brother Love Bruce Prichard joined as color commentator.



Global's Own Point/ Counterpoint

Scott Hudson (L) and Steve Prazak

7 Sharp Decline, Year-End Resurgence Of WCW Weekly Cable Programs

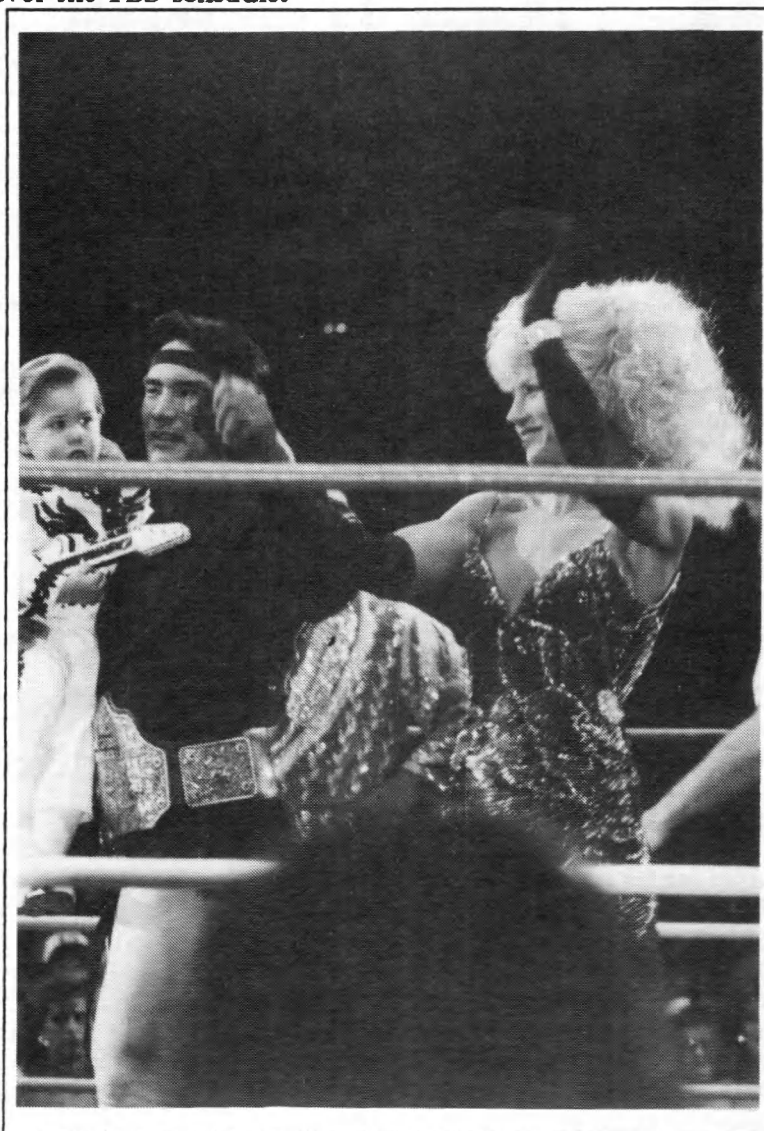
Partially brought on by sameness of formats and briefly abetted by the departure of Ric Flair to the WWF, ratings for Turner Broadcasting's weekly WCW series took a serious tumble in the second and third quarters of 1991, particularly the one-time flagship show, *WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING* on Saturday nights. For two weeks in midsummer, *WCW* dropped below a 2 rating—its lowest since the waning months of the original Dusty Rhodes booking era on TBS and the early period of Ted Turner's buyout of the NWA, when the Saturday night show was moved all over the TBS schedule.

The eventual 1.8 for the Saturday evening effort and 1.3 for the Saturday morning *POWER HOUR* ended the decline. Perhaps regenerated by a new focus to the promotion without Flair, a revived interest in Sting, strong heel work from the re-imported Cactus Jack and fall acquisitions of Ricky Steamboat and Rick Rude, *WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING* came back to handily capture the fourth quarter by nearly half a rating point over its closest challenger and the morning *POWER HOUR* reached or topped a 2 rating five times during the same period.

8 TBS Clash Specials Dip in Ratings

After three years of solid performance in the Nielsens, *CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS* showed a cable ratings decline similar to the nosedive taken on NBC by *SATURDAY NIGHT'S MAIN EVENT*.

The February, June and September specials all failed to crack a 4 rating with the fall event, headlined by a tournament to decide new WCW world tag champions, falling to the lowest-ever mark in *CLASH* history, a 3.7. Ironically, the audience crash coincided with the return to WCW of Dusty



Back Home in WCW

Ricky Steamboat

Rhodes as booker. The first two specials of the year included Ric Flair title defenses against Scott Steiner and Bobby Eaton, the latter a 2-out-of-3 fall affair. But neither generated the kind of ratings surge past Flair main events usually provided.

The one promising note came in November when, front-loaded with a U.S. title match between Sting and Rick Rude and the best tag team match on live American TV during 1991, Steamboat and Dustin Rhodes winning the WCW world belts from Arn Anderson and Larry Zbyszko, the *CLASH* rebounded to a 4.3 rating and 6.1 per cent share of audience.

But that revival was short-lived. A January 1992 special, headlined by a Sting/Steamboat vs. Rude/Steve Austin tag finale, fell back to a 3.7/5.5, the latter number the weakest share ever for a first-run *CLASH*.

9 Prime Time Wrestling Goes Through Two Format Changes, Ratings Slump

Vince McMahon saw both the high road and the low road for *PRIME TIME WRESTLING* during 1991. Reformatting the stagnant Monday night cable flagship offering for the USA Cable Network, McMahon switched from the news studio with Gorilla Monsoon and Bobby Heenan to a live audience, comedy sketch format in early 1991, featuring the WWF owner as straight man to Heenan. The new format combined past elements of the old *TNT* show, without a live orchestra, with clips from WWF arena and syndicated shows.

The series featured several tasteless elements, including intros in the first three editions which pictured McMahon (in one of his designer jogging outfits) and Heenan perched over toilet stalls in voiding position prior to going out on set. Every appearance by the Nasty Boys included them being followed throughout the Titan Sports building, spraypainting the place. The Legion of Doom appeared in an amusing cooking sketch. The Bushwhackers attempted to deliver a weather report. A holdover from Heenan's bomb of a talk show the year before, Jameson, became a regular comic foil in the audience. Paul Bearer demonstrated the technique of embalming on Lord Alfred Hayes, which led to some of Heenan's funniest one-liners of the entire series.

PTW surged to the dominant spot in the cable ratings in the second and third quarters (despite a move in the spring to Tuesday nights to accommodate USA's World League of American Football Monday games) but after the debut appearance of Ric Flair (by this time, Sean Mooney had replaced McMahon as host) in early September, the audience levels just as quickly crashed. Comedy skits appeared to be repeating themselves almost weekly. The series became predictably formulaic in a WWF babyface making a fool out of Heenan in the finales. Eventually, the segments became more bizarre, including a "kidnaping" of Mooney and a less-than-credible situation which saw Jameson apparently smashed flat by the tire of an 18-wheeler.

By late October, the series had dropped perilously to consistent ratings of 2.2 and 2.3, low even for its usual fall drop opposite ABC's *MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL*. By November, McMahon had reworked the format again and re-inserted himself as host.

In a discussion format, not unlike TV's syndicated *McLAUGHLIN GROUP* or *THIS WEEK WITH DAVID BRINKLEY*, McMahon used assorted guest panelists with himself and Heenan before eventually settling on a regular grouping of Heenan and Curt Hennig on the heel side and Monsoon and the "repented" Reverend Slick as babyfaces. The debates often debilitated into the type of yelling reserved for the old *MORTON DOWNEY JR.* talk show but appeared to be less frenetic and, certainly, less susceptible to the type of creative burnout experienced with the comedy format.

By late December, the roundtable *PRIME TIME* effort began to inch back upward in the ratings, rising to a 2.7 and eventually returning to a 3 in early January 1992. However, the beginning of a new year brought on one significant change for *PTW*. USA opted to cancel the weekly Wednesday night repeat showings of the series.

10

Portland Wrestling Ends After 34 Years As Northwest TV Tradition

The Crow's Nest may have been the most unusual definition for a television wrestling interview spot. And promoter Don Owen may still occasionally botch the hometowns of the competitors. But they went together as part of a tradition which came to an end in Portland on the final Saturday in December 1991.

PORTLAND WRESTLING, known until its last three years as **BIG TIME WRESTLING**, was canceled as a weekly staple by KPTV, the Northwest independent which had carried the series for 27 of its 34 years on the air. The last of the old NWA-affiliated territorial shows, **PW** suffered from the same cancer which plagued so many single-city wrestling shows in the late 1980s and early '90s: declining ratings and increasing production costs.

KPTV found the show no longer profitable, particularly after lead sponsor Tom Peterson Appliances filed for chapter 11 bankruptcy, and could no longer underwrite the broadcasts. The Saturday night tradition had been canceled in Seattle more than two years earlier.

The program began on KPTV in 1957 when the station was on UHF channel 27. In 1959, the show moved to KOIN (channel 6) for an eight-year run, before returning to KPTV, which had then switched to a stronger channel 12 frequency. The series was carried live until going to tape delay in 1978.

WWF star Roddy Piper, who remained loyal to Owen after the Portland promoter gave him a job at a time when NWA promoters were reluctant to deal with him and helped modernize the production values of the show in the late 1980s, returned for the next-to-last episode to give a tribute to Owen and a less-than-veiled slam at other wrestlers for taking advantage of Owen.

11

Marvez, Bruno Blast WWF Steroid Testing on Entertainment Tonight

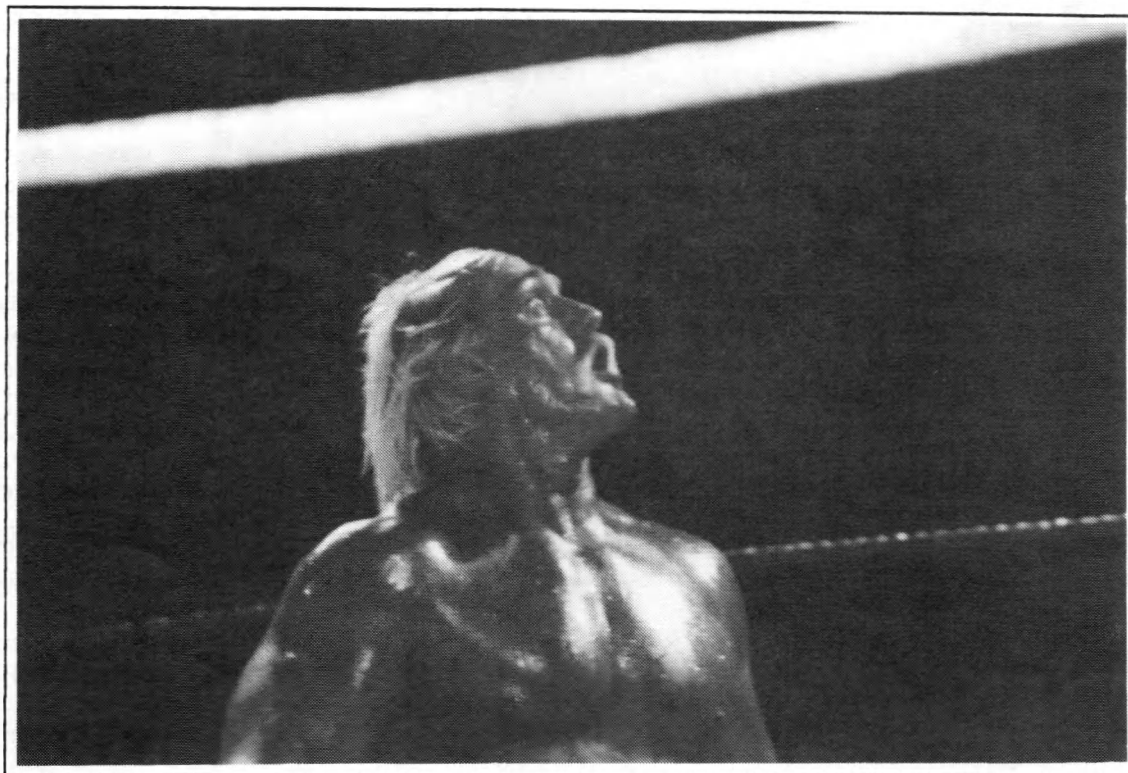
The steroid trial of Dr. George T. Zahorian II did not become a major television news story (except for the trial city of Harrisburg PA) last year in the fashion it has and will in 1992. But the World Wrestling Federation's controversial plans to implement a steroid testing program, first announced by Vince McMahon on his **PRIME TIME WRESTLING** series just weeks after the trial, were cast in a questionable spotlight on the syndicated **ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT**, usually a good friend to Titan Sports.

ET covered the announced launching of the anabolic testing in New Haven CT in mid-November. Anchor John Tesh reported a WWF spokesperson said Hulk Hogan was the first in line to take the test. Titan Sports jobber Brian Donahue was interviewed as saying: "It's fine with us. It's fine with everyone in that locker room." But veteran jobber Dusty Wolfe told **ET** he was not tested. "I did not take one personally but, as far as I know, they did some." Titan's Steve Planamenta later said Wolfe was not tested because "he's not under contract to us. He just works on a show-by-show basis. We can't test him. We're only testing the people who are under exclusive contract to us."

But syndicated Knight-Ridder columnist Alex Marvez and former WWWF champion Bruno Sammartino blasted the legitimacy of the tests. Said Sammartino: "They'll get rid of a few people and they'll say, ah, they tested positive for steroid drugs. And a lot of the gullible audience out there will believe they're really doing legitimate drug testing. It's all a sham."

Marvez added, on the same program: "The WWF's sister company, the World Bodybuilding Federation, has announced that they have had a steroid test in place three times in the last year. It's all a lie. Why should anyone believe the World Wrestling Federation now?"

Incidentally, **ET** came back the following Monday with a highly-favorable report on the WWF.



12 *Hulk Hogan Denies Steroid Abuse on Arsenio Hall Show*

Again, the wrestling/steroid connection has become more of a television story in 1992 than it was last year. But just weeks after the Zahorian trial, Hulk Hogan took to the friendly confines of *THE ARSENIO HALL SHOW* to refute charges of steroid abuse. *THE NEW YORK TIMES* named Hogan as one of several pro wrestlers who received steroid shipments from Zahorian but the charge was dropped before the trial and Hogan was not called to testify.

With Hall, Hogan attempted feebly to portray himself as a wrestler who had only taken steroids on three occasions and, then, only as treatment for injuries. He blasted the news media for linking him to the Zahorian probe and used his cliché "say your prayers, eat your vitamins and train hard" for children.

However, communications analysts who viewed the appearance (along with ex-wrestlers Superstar Billy Graham and Dave Shults) saw a noticeably nervous Hogan, who stammered for sentences and used the word "basically" 23 times to preface statements---not a usual trait for Hogan, who has appeared with Hall at least a half-dozen times. Inside the mat community, the credibility of Hogan's statements, apparently calculated by WWF owner Vince McMahon, were immediately questioned.

In January 1992, Graham and Shults would accuse Hogan of lying on the syndicated newsmagazine *INSIDE EDITION* and several major newspapers, including *THE NEW YORK POST*, would pounce on Hogan after Graham and Shults went into more depth of their accusations on John Arezzi's *PRO WRESTLING SPOTLIGHT* radio show. The slowly-unfolding scandal will likely prove to be the top television wrestling story of the current year.

13 *Steiners & Hase/Sasake Steal Show In WCW/New Japan Pay Special*

Mixing aerial and Greco-Roman skill with fast Japanese-style action, Rick and Scott Steiner made literal wrestling history and combined with New Japan stars Hiroshi Hase and Kensuke Sasaki to steal the attention in the first *WCW/NEW JAPAN SUPERSHOW*, the first pay-per-view card from Tokyo ever to air in the United States.

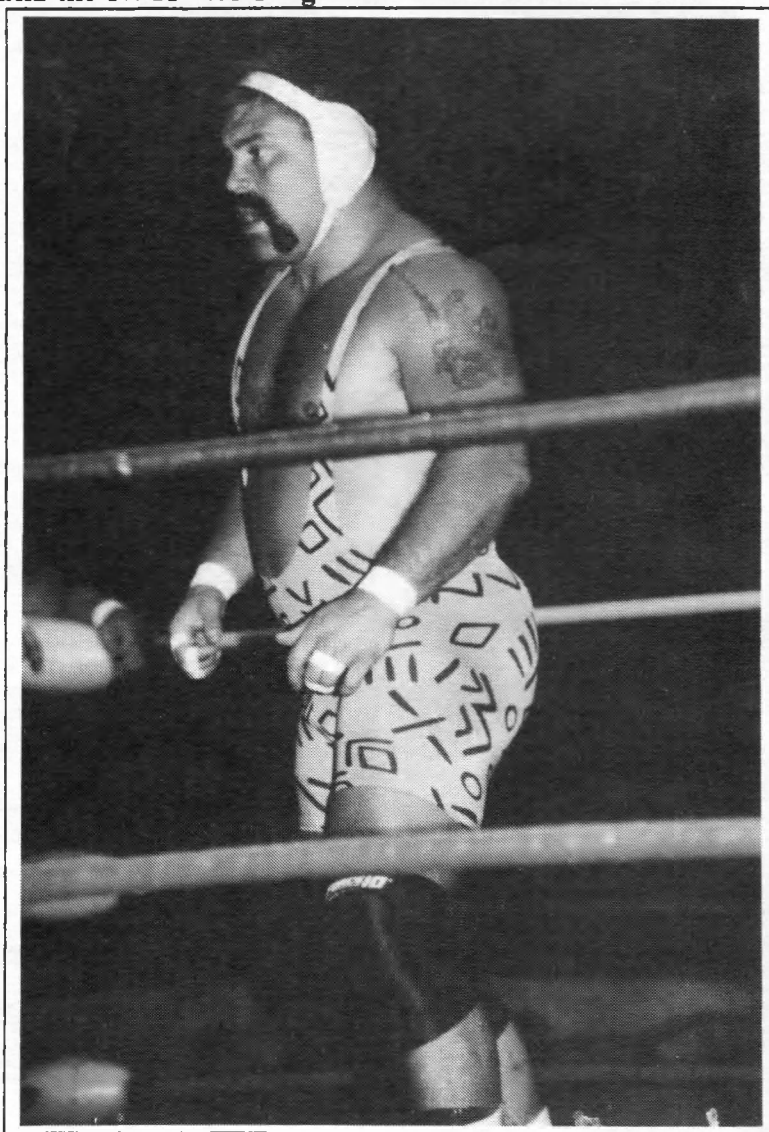
Scheduled as a \$9.95 "mini" pay-per-view on a three-week tape delay from the Egg Dome in Tokyo, the Steiners defeated Hase and Sasaki to become the first team ever to simultaneously hold the WCW world and U.S. titles and the IWGP world tag team belts.

The event scored only an 0.6% buy-rate, which soured WCW on attempting a planned fall budget-priced pay show, but launched a significant exchange program between the Antonio Inoki group and Turner Broadcasting.

In the finale of the *SUPERSHOW*, WCW world champion Ric Flair appeared to have lost his belt to Tatsumi Fujinami and 64,000 fans left the Egg Dome with the same impression. However, in a post-match news conference staged for TBS, Flair barged into the press room and snatched back his belt after original referee Bill Alfonso, bumped out of the ring in a finish memorable of past Dusty Rhodes "ref bump" endings, said in his "recovery," he saw Fujinami throw Flair over the top rope and ruled for a Flair win by disqualification. Flair would defeat Fujinami in a rematch in St. Petersburg at *SUPERBRAWL* in May.

The special also introduced Japanese sensation Jushin Liger (Keiichi Yamada) to American viewers, prior to an end-of-the-year U.S. tour, which saw Liger defeat Brian Pillman at the Omni for the newly-created WCW light heavyweight championship.

SUPERSHOW almost marked the reunion of Jim Ross and Tony Schiavone as an announce team, their first pairing together since their days together on World Championship Wrestling in 1988.

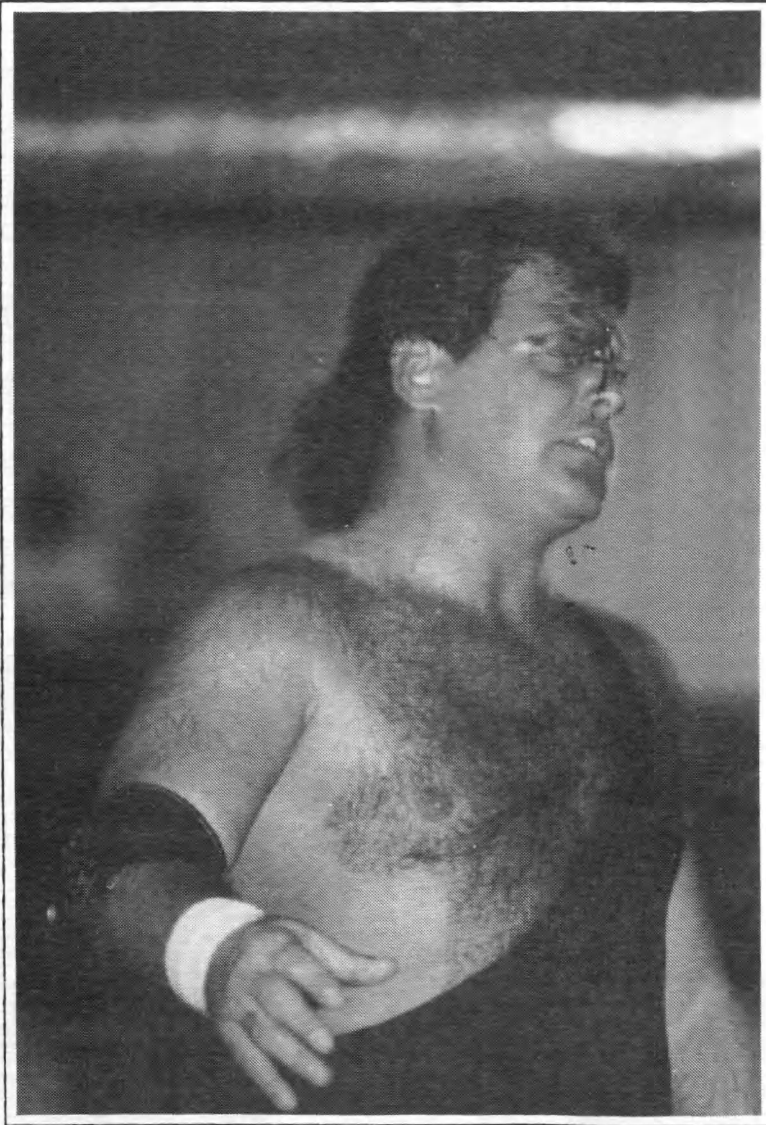


Superstar of SUPERSHOW

Rick Steiner

14 *Memphis USWA Show Loses Traditional 11 a.m. Time Slot*

For years, it was "the franchise." Perhaps the most lucrative locally-produced television program for a television station in America. Not unheard of were 30-plus ratings and 80 per cent shares of the viewing audience. Eleven o'clock on Saturday mornings launched a 90-minute period where toilet flushes would dramatically decline in Memphis, Tennessee, during the modestly-titled *CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING*.



How Long Can It Last?

Jerry Lawler on WMC-TV

Lance Russell was Mr. Announcer for the Mid-South and Jerry Lawler the star of the show. They all came in—Hulk Hogan, Andre the Giant, Rick Rude, Kimala, Ric Flair, Buzz Sawyer, David Shults, Tommy Rich, Randy Savage—and all eventually had to face "The King."

But Russell's departure for WCW in 1989 and the constant absorption of top-line supporting talent by the "big two" promotions, plus a front-line assault of competing wrestling shows on Memphis independents has led to an erosion of local ratings. Where once advertisers stood in line to command exposure to the masses who craved Saturday morning wrestling on WMC-TV, the show does not sell for the record prices of its zenith years of the early-to-mid 1980s.

Another crack in the erosion came in August 1991 as the now-named *USWA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING* was moved from the traditional 11 a.m. hour to 10 a.m., where it now faces a head-on assault from WCW on independent WLMT. The change was made after an increasing incursion of college basketball and NBC's purchase of a six-game Notre Dame football package was forcing the series to be moved constantly on the WMC schedule.

The Memphis show, the last local live weekly mat series on U.S. television, has reverted to a series of controversial storylines with men hitting women, usually featuring Eric Embry.

15 *Wrestling's "Bad Boy" Mansfield Returns to Television with IWF*

He hates the designation of "bad boy." In his world, he was only attempting to clean up a blight the wrestling industry long since needed to cleanse. He was willing to sacrifice his career to do it.

The pride of Columbus, Georgia, Eddie Mansfield exposed pro wrestling's inner secrets in a much-celebrated edition of ABC's *20/20* in 1985, the year of record mat arena attendance in the U.S. Years of what he felt was shortchanging on salaries and promises by old-line promoters made him determined to "tell it like it is" about the industry which had once seen him reach the edge of national stardom as the villainous "Continental Lover."

A book and talked-of movie failed to materialize from Mansfield's expose with ABC correspondent John Stossel. But Mansfield remarried, spent several years in New York working on commercials and studying acting. The name would crop up occasionally in newsletters or to promoters or wrestlers who usually responded as if the namedropper had just uttered the ultimate profanity. The last thing anyone ever suspected would be a reincarnation of Eddie Mansfield with the wrestling industry.

But return he did in 1991. The International Wrestling Federation, based in central Florida, began taping for Florida's Sunshine Network in the summer at Universal Studios near Orlando. Building the promotion around "world" champion Mondo Kleen, Mansfield employed a base of performers who regularly worked for several other Florida independents but employed production values a cut above the average independent group.

Mansfield worked as color commentator on the shows and taped segments with wrestlers at various locales around the movie park. While the series never escaped the virtual obscurity of regional sports cable, Mansfield—despite reports he and associates denied of impending financial trouble, leaked primarily by cable executives—was making plans for an expansion to broadcast syndication in the winter of 1992.

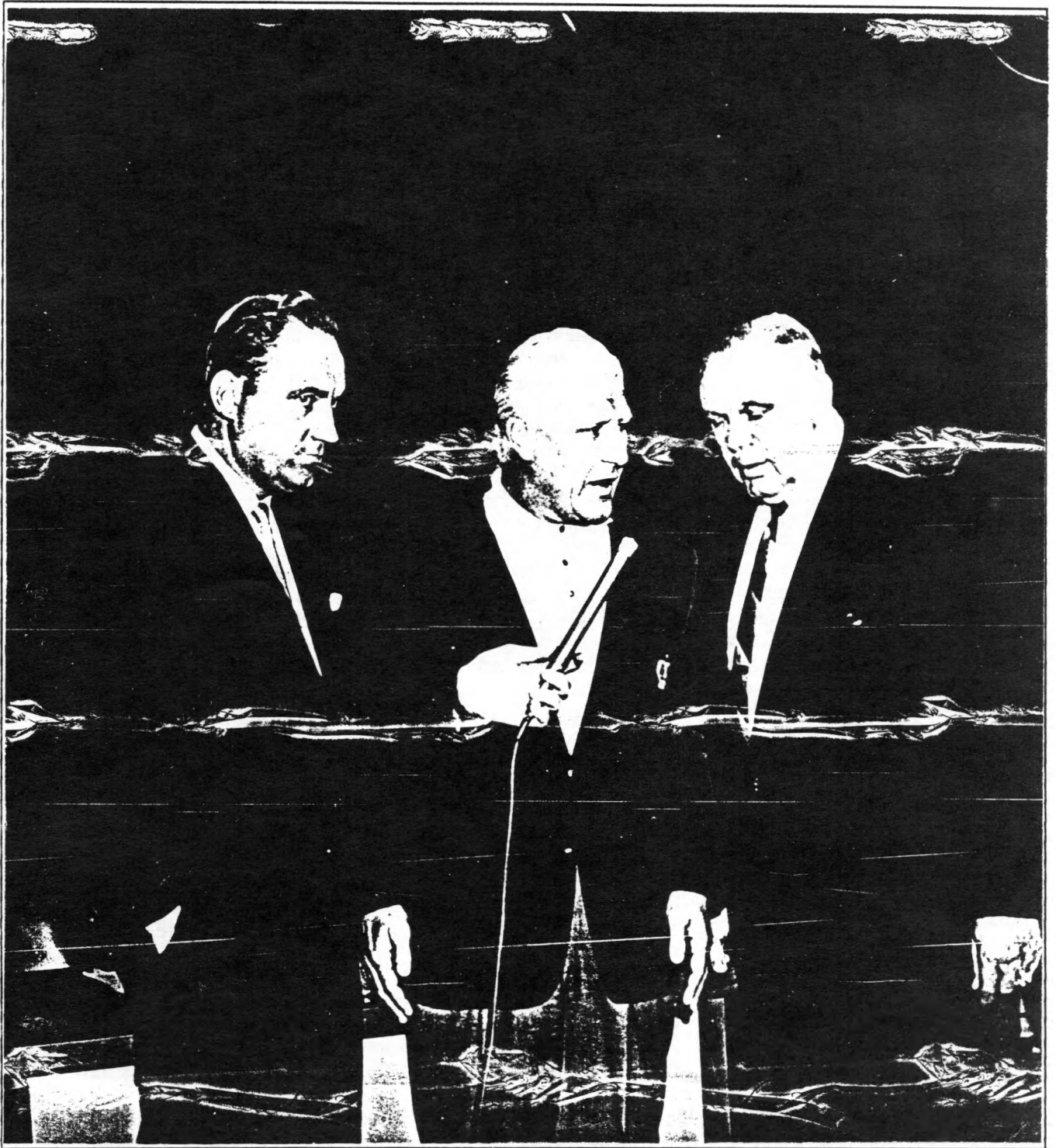
At deadline, the IWF was close to a deal to go on the regular circulation of Channel America affiliates, which serves low-power and small-town independent stations. Additionally, the series was picked up to replace IWCCW on the seven-hour marathon of *SATURDAY NIGHT SUPERSTARS* on WVEU-TV in Atlanta, the biggest-market clearance to date for the IWF.

Mansfield, whose expose was first detailed on Columbus ABC affiliate WTVM by investigative reporter Sam Hall before the national story, called *MATWATCH* late in 1991. "Tell everybody we're alive and well," said Mansfield. "I know some people have been spreading stories that we're about to go under but that's not true. We've got some new financing our way and we think by building slow, we have the right growth in mind. I'm telling you, we're gonna be around a long time." Of course, the viewers will decide that.

Certainly the unfolding steroid story, which will be more widely-covered on the national broadcast media this year, will be atop the list of 1992 stories. Jesse Ventura's return to weekly wrestling television on WCW's *WORLD WIDE WRESTLING* is doubtless the major re-entry story at the microphone.

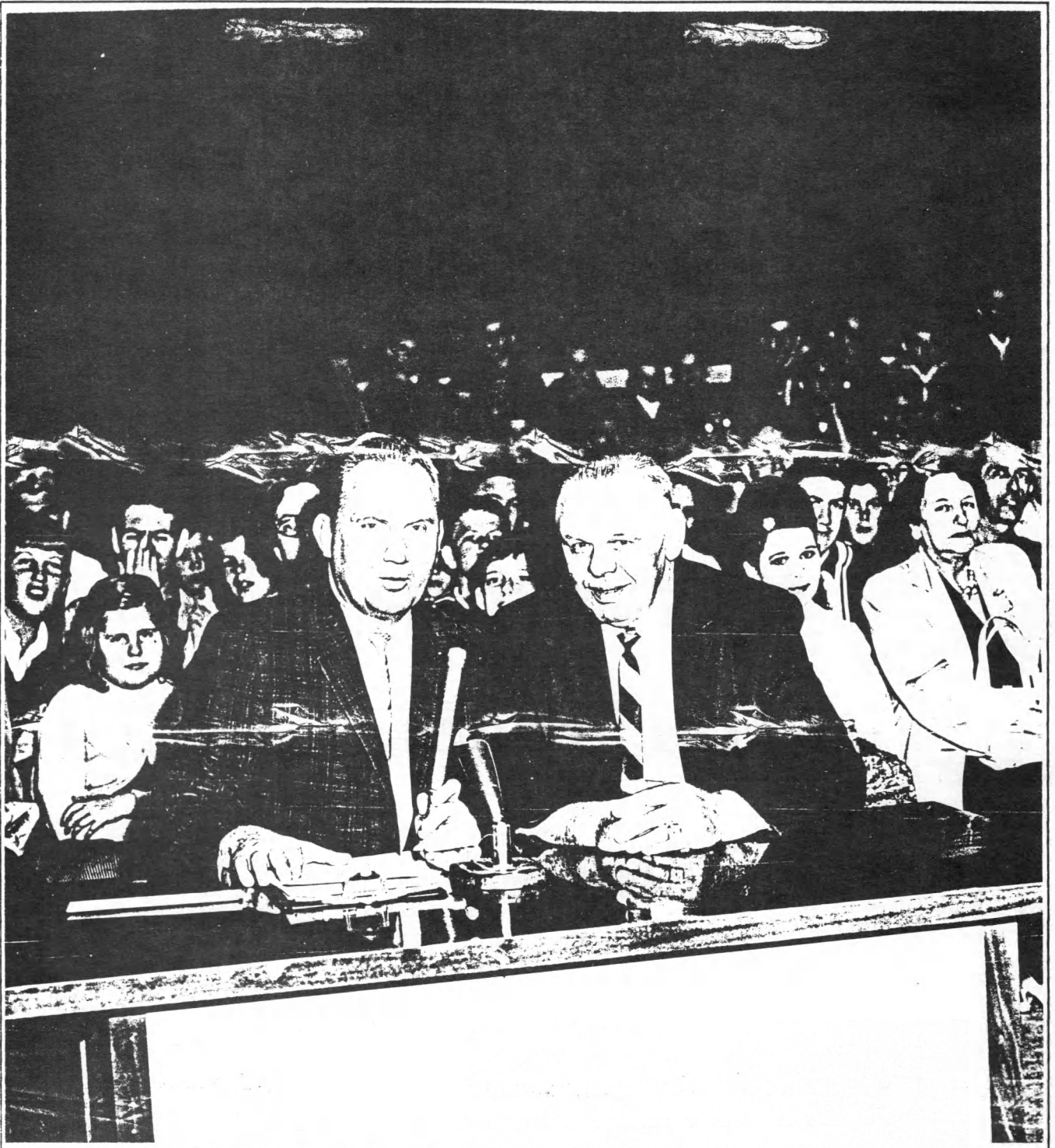
How new WCW chief Kip Frey restructures the six WCW television shows could be a major factor in the coming year, in addition to the recent Atlanta TV expose of the company's hiring practices for minorities.

Ultimately, the story to watch will be the weekly ratings race: that remains the bread and butter for national advertising for the "big two" promotions and how any of the scandals centering around Hogan affect the desire of sponsoring companies to touch the mat shows will be the most significant trend involving the business side of wrestling TV.



Matwatch Memory: Ed Capral

Atlanta Announcing Great (L) with Freddie Blassie (C) and Promoter Paul Jones (R)



Georgia Wrestling in the 1960s

Ed Capral (L) with Promoter Paul Jones (R) in WAIL-TV Studios



Chapter One

"Steve, You're Going To Have To Get Rid Of Some Things"

To a small extent, I know what an athlete feels like when forced to retire from competition. No tearful news conferences, no front office job, no endorsement contracts. Just a bit of a void, knowing one will be altering a routine of discipline and demand which has continued over a period of years.

Jim Ross once said to me, "Sometimes, I wonder what we're gonna do *with* MATWATCH...but I can't picture us without it." I told Jim, "I honestly can. I'm older than just about anyone, save Tom Burke, who does one of these things and eventually, the time comes to move on to other things." But, as I told several people a couple of weeks after the final issue of weekly MATWATCH, while it is refreshing to be able to breathe on weekends without the pressure of having to monitor every "Line of the Week," my emotions are much as they were the last time I left television news for work in university communications. A good six months elapsed before I could stop running to the window, or dashing out the door every time I heard an ambulance or fire siren. One has certain instincts inbred which are hard to break.

Later in this retrospective, I will tell you the depth of the story of the illness which changed my life and, ultimately, brought an end to what MATWATCHer Dan Farren once called "that weekly letter from home." But when a doctor looked me in the eye and said, bluntly, "Steve, you're going to have to get rid of some things if you want to live a healthy life," I had little doubt what they would include.

MATWATCH had been a venture which began almost as a lark, an offshoot of research for a graduate degree at Auburn University. Tracing the history of professional wrestling on television as an academic study is not only considered offbeat but heretical by many professors. Try blowing that topic by a master of rhetorical theory. If one ever advances beyond an undergraduate program in college, one finds politics simply in getting a thesis or dissertation by a committee of academicians. So one has to set about seeking departmental professors who find your subject worthy of a thorough examination.

Three distinguished PhDs in communication agreed: George Plasketes, Steve Padgett and Don Richardson---and the latter two have been wrestling fans, Don remembering

fondly the early days of watching Gorgeous George on a small five-inch television screen. Guiding me through a year of work, the two watched as I attempted to translate what had been a lifetime in the memory bank into something which could be documented.

Early on, I met Joe Pedicino and Gordon Solie during their early days of the nationally-syndicated *PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK*. Joe and Gordon shared liberally with me their views of the national explosion of pro wrestling and how its seeming overexposure on television would ultimately evolve. As Joe said, "Too much wrestling on TV won't kill it. Too much *bad* wrestling on television will---and we're in real danger of that right now." Mind you, this was 1988. Gordon chimed in: "Anybody who can get together \$3,000 can hire himself a TV crew, call himself a wrestling promoter and if he can buy some time on a satellite or a local station, can get some exposure. The problem is: so many of these new guys are just feeding the kitty too much and after a while, the ratings will drop and the station managers are going to get wise that this is too much of a good thing. Which means it's not all a good thing."

After Joe and I became friends for a few months, he showed me *THE WRESTLING OBSERVER* and a couple of other newsletters on the market. "You could do a lot for us," said Pedicino. "You wouldn't want to try to duplicate what (Dave) Meltzer does. But you're a TV guy and if you focused on that, I bet you could generate some interest." I scoffed at the idea but Joe had planted a seed. I kept it in the back of my mind.

Finally, I decided to test-market MATWATCH with seven people, some of whom had been long-time friends and three whom I had corresponded with from "The Readers' Pages" in the *OBSERVER*. After four weeks, the feedback was favorable---particularly encouraging was my colleague, Richard Hyatt, an award-winning columnist for *THE COLUMBUS LEDGER-ENQUIRER* and Glenn Fox, who was a devout follower of the Pacific Northwest scene from Seattle. So, I trudged forward.

One of the first to respond by telephone was Craig Peters of the G.C. London publications. Craig and I had become phone friends through my graduate research and he called to leave a "thumbs up" message with my wife and warned her, "Let me prepare you, you're probably going to have a lot of people calling your number. You better tell Steve he might consider getting a second line." I didn't understand what that meant until about three months later when the midnight ritual of calls began.

In the first four months, we jumped to 65 subscribers and that number advanced to more than one hundred by Christmas. Suddenly, MATWATCH was more than a pastime. It was a full-time part-time business. I learned quickly the value of an electric stapler in saving wear and tear on the wrist. I recognized the limitations of a Commodore-64 computer in not being able to split columns. Soon, I became aware my weekends were no longer my own---nor my wife's.

As in any venture of this import, on paper and in the mind, doing what, at first, was a four-page weekly newsletter does not seem a terribly difficult project. And for one who has been a professional journalist since 1971 and a broadcaster since 1968---in addition to being a wrestling fan since '65, MATWATCH appeared to be a snap. But as subscribers began to multiply, the realization was rapid: this would be no sidelight. And I was made aware whether popular or not, people within the wrestling industry do pay attention to these publications, particularly if they sense them having any influence with decisionmakers.

Some of the most remarkable oddseys occurred in the first year of MATWATCH. Coming into contact with people who had only been guests in my home through television, as I had been for many viewers through nightly newscasts. Rekindling the old reporting skills of patience, winning trust and cultivating sources. Learning that wrestling newsletters require a different kind of journalism, where source names are kept anonymous to a far degree greater than in mainline news. And discovering one is vulnerable to wider margin of error. Relive some of those early days with me.

Chapter Two

The Early Stories

When MATWATCH launched in late June 1988, we were actually picking up a story "in progress," as a television cliché would have it. Dave Meltzer called on a late April morning to ask if I had heard reports of Turner Broadcasting System considering a purchase of the National Wrestling Alliance, at least the Jim Crockett Promotions subsidiary of it. In fact, I had. A college buddy of mine was in broadcasting in Atlanta and his wife had connections with TBS. In one of our conversations of the past week, my friend---who knew of my interesting in wrestling---mentioned the rumor circulating in the company of Ted Turner possibly buying into a promotion.

As my pal explained, Turner was nervous about potential changes in FCC regulations which would require syndication exclusivity, or "syndex," for off-network programming on superstations, as was WTBS. Syndex would mean a local station buying *LITTLE HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE* could demand a cable operator black out the daily *LITTLE HOUSE* episode in that local station's city. The local station would be buying exclusivity to the rights to that program in its market. TBS was in the middle of a dual dilemma: first, wrestling had always been a bread-and-butter ratings staple, usually in the top five of quarterly cable ratings. It could be counted on to provide four hours of highly-watched, blackout-proof programming to keep the hugely-profitable superstation alive on cable systems. Second, Crockett Promotions---which had been the supplier of wrestling programming on TBS since April 1985---was in financial trouble. The territorial makeup of pro wrestling had gradually dissolved after the national invasion of Vince McMahon's World Wrestling Federation in 1984. Crockett had bought out the fast-rising Universal Wrestling Federation of Bill Watts the year before and skyrocketing salaries and television production and travel costs were draining the Crockett books in an attempt to compete with McMahon.

Turner Home Entertainment had already entered an agreement to take over pay-per-view distribution of Crockett/NWA pay-per-view events after Crockett's first two ventures in the pay arena had stumbled in clearing cable systems. The summer *GREAT AMERICAN BASH* would be the premiere Turner/Crockett effort. Now, TBS was looking at owning the entire shooting match (Turner had unsuccessfully sought to buy the World Wrestling Federation when McMahon briefly forged the WWF onto WTBS in 1984). A meeting of men in suits in the skybox at a card at The Omni was the starting point.

From that clandestine affair, a weekly TurnerWatch had begun. But other stories were simultaneously unfolding. NWA world champion Ric Flair was being besieged again to jump to the WWF, likely to supplant the ailing Harley Race as "The King." Jerry Lawler was on the verge of winning the AWA world title from Curt Hennig---the first time a Verne Gagne singles belt would change hands in Memphis. And Eddie

Gilbert was building momentum, via the Financial News Network SCORE service, as booker of the Alabama-based Continental Wrestling Federation.

The first story which significantly touched us all was in my fourth issue: the murder of Bruiser Brody. I could not focus on the life of Brody in the fashion Dave Meltzer could. Brody was one of Meltzer's closest friends in the industry. I had never met him. But I could put in perspective how television handled his death and I must add, as far as the major promotions were concerned, Brody was rudely treated. Neither the WWF, nor the NWA or AWA made the first mention of him. The World Class group, where he had regularly worked in the mid-'80s, produced a retrospective of his memorable matches in Texas. Jerry Blackwell's Southern Championship Wrestling repeated Brody's last U.S. TV match, a brawl against Abdullah the Butcher which went all over a rodeo barn in suburban Atlanta.

However, no television show captured the heart and soul of how Frank Goodish was regarded as a person, as well as a wrestling character, as did Joe Pedicino's *PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK*. For once, wrestlers who had made their livings as virtual prehistoric creatures of brutality transcended their profession and became people. For 30 minutes, Joe and a group of Georgia wrestlers sat inside a ring and just talked about Brody, the man. Buck Robley asking Brody to save him "a place upstairs because it won't be long before we'll be joining you." Pedicino remembering how he and Brody often sat and talked about their sons, who were the same age. And the most poignant moment when tears welled up in Blackwell's eyes and the 400-pound Georgian, who had been in and out of rings with Brody for several years, could not go on as he tried to talk about his friend. It was simple, direct, emotional television at its best and is still a collector's item for anyone who can find a tape of that episode of *PWTW*.

The hunger in 1988 for something more than what Vince McMahon and Jim Crockett were giving audiences was never more underscored than when the virtually dead Continental promotion in Alabama, a territory burned out by the overcycled Fuller-Armstrong feuds, was purchased by television station owner David Woods.

David's father, Charles, had once run for governor of Alabama, and for years, David was a camera operator at his father's Dothan station, WTVY, which was the flagship for Southeastern Gulf Coast wrestling until the early 1980s. David had always been a mat fan and with the success of his WCOV-TV in Montgomery as an independent, obtained financing from Colonial Bank to buy out Ron Fuller's Alabama territory in early 1988 (Fuller turned around and opened a Tennessee group, USA Wrestling, which Woods also purchased in the summer of '88).

One of Woods' early moves was to hire Gilbert, who had revived his own stalled career with a winter stint in Memphis (during which he was involved in the year's most spectacular angle---a WMC-TV parking lot brawl which ended with Gilbert depositing Jerry Lawler through the windshield of a car), as booker in April.

Many viewers considered the move to be a folly. But Gilbert immediately dumped the territory's tired talent and hired Paul E. Dangerously as the lead heel manager. For youth appeal, he recruited Shane Douglas (whom Gilbert had trained in Bill Watts' UWF) and Sid Eudy, changing Eudy's Lord Humongous character from heel to baby-face. More heat was applied to two old Continental rivals, Tony Anthony and Tom Prichard---kicked off by an angle where Anthony "hung" Prichard over a rope. Gilbert split the Nightmares, Ken Wayne and Danny Davis and began an intense light heavy-weight feud. An old favorite, Austin Idol, returned. A considered washed-up Pez Whatley was renamed Willie B. Hert and Gilbert and Dangerously nearly created a riot in Birmingham when they decked Whatley's son in an angle. Jerry Lawler came in to defend his newly-won AWA championship. Plus, there was the ever-present Missy Hyatt, who nearly created a riot in Ozark AL when a concessionaire refused to give her a Coca-Cola free of charge.

Gilbert even revamped the announce team, dumping the venerable Gordon Solie and pairing former Continental play-by-play caller Charlie Platt with *PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK* host Joe Pedicino. Coupling the intense action with a deal to air the program on Financial News Network's SCORE sports service, the redubbed Continental Wrestling Federation appeared to be on its way to a solid footing as the top indie promotion in the country.

However, cracks began to develop before Gilbert's planned supercard, *THE ROAD TO BIRMINGHAM*, to crown a first CWF heavyweight champion. *TRTB* was originally planned for an August date in Birmingham's Boutwell Auditorium. But remodeling in the Boutwell was stalled because of a union strike. In August, a CWF show failed to air on SCORE because of Woods' refusal to pay Federal Express shipping charges for the tape. According to Platt, tensions were mounting within the troupe and with Woods over the behavior of Hyatt. "She'd always tell the wrestlers she was gonna go tell Eddie if they didn't fly right," said Platt. "Plus, Ron West and I had to talk the police out of arresting her in Ozark when she cut that scene at the concession stand. Eddie may have had his faults but I liked him. David liked him. And when he was on his own, he was as fine a booker as you'd ever see, but half of his problems were created by his wife." Missy denied, in a handwritten letter to me in 1990, she was a problem, said she didn't understand why I didn't like her and accused me of deliberately spreading negative stories about her. More on that later. In a conversation with Woods shortly after the demise of the CWF in 1990, the executive again professed admiration for Gilbert. "It was amazing to sit and listen to him visualize a character in his mind. He could make him come alive," said Woods. "But that wife of his was another story." Woods smiled as he made the latter comment.

But the serious break between Woods and Gilbert came over a situation both men continue to dispute. Eddie sat out several Continental dates because of what he called a reoccurrence of an old shoulder injury and was hospitalized. Yet, he appeared on a midwest show his father booked during his idleness for Continental. He wrestled Chris Adams, who later told Dave Meltzer it was obvious when they locked up that Gilbert should never have been in the ring. Woods was infuriated, as was Platt. "If Eddie had just told me he was going to do that show for his daddy, it wouldn't have been so bad," said Woods. "But he told me he couldn't work at all and when I called him, Missy tried to deny he was even on that show. That really took it for me." On a trip to Memphis in the summer of 1990, Gilbert told me he took the date because he had made the promise to his father weeks before and didn't want to let him down. "I didn't have any business being in that ring and I paid for it for two weeks after that," said Gilbert. "I didn't work any other matches besides that one."

The fifteenth week of *MATWATCH* was when the split was final. After a series of phone arguments, Gilbert and Dangerously left for Montgomery. An afternoon phone call from Platt confirmed Gilbert was out as booker. But the story was Woods had fired him. Not having a phone number for Eddie or Paul, I immediately called Pedicino in Atlanta because I knew he would not continue with CWF without Gilbert. Joe had not heard the news and, frankly, was stunned. I asked Joe to see if he could get either Eddie or Paul to call me because I felt obligated to get both sides of the story. He said he would try. Within an hour, one of the two did call and shared a very candid perspective of the situation: yes, there had been problems---but they were from David Woods' alleged frugality and failure to be more than a "mark" to the business. I was told Gilbert had paid Ronnie Garvin \$500 from his own pocket to make a guest appearance on a Knoxville show. Woods later told me the accusation of frugality was true because "I was undercapitalized to do what Eddie wanted to do and we had to get control of expenses." Gilbert's departure came only four days in advance of *TRTB*, which played to a crowd of 1,215 and saw Prichard win the CWF belt. Woods replaced Gilbert with Bob Armstrong and, later, Robert Fuller (with a short stint from Bill Dundee between) as booker and the promotion never recovered.

Meanwhile, a story was surfacing shortly after Harley Race was forced to drop out as "The King" in the World Wrestling Federation to have a partial colostomy. The phones were working overtime to determine if Ric Flair was finally going to make the jump to the WWF. Already, promos were blitzing WWF TV shows that Brother Love would have as his guest on the first *SUMMER SLAM* someone who had never before appeared in the federation. Few people would accept Flair would go to Titan as "The King," but indeed, that was where negotiations were brewing.

We had been told in mid-August that Flair had been confiding in the woman from Atlanta who has made his spectacular ring robes, wavering between a "should I?" or "should I not?" perspective. With one's proverbial 20/20 hindsight, a jump at that point, while business was still stronger at the arenas for the then-NWA, may have made a Hulk Hogan-Flair eventual title match much more valuable financially for Vince McMahon and for the two principals. And at least one clue of Flair's possible intentions surfaced in a mid-August NWA show in Montgomery AL, two weeks before the WWF pay-per-view. In a six-man tag match, where a declining Brad Armstrong was subbing for Nikita Koloff to team with Steve Williams and Sting against Flair, Arn Anderson and Tully Blanchard, Brad pinned Flair clean in the middle. The next morning, even Meltzer professed shock. "Flair doesn't do jobs," Dave said. "Well, he did last night and it was cleaner than Comet makes a sink," I told him. My companion at the matches, Cal Callaway, and I speculated either one of two things: Flair was going to the WWF, or was doing Brad a favor before the home folks. It was no real secret Brad, who was mostly relegated to early-card bouts, had contacted Charlie Platt and David Woods to see if he was still in good graces with Continental.

As late as the Thursday before, we learned much later, Titan officials still felt they had Flair for the first *SUMMER SLAM*. But he opted to stay with the financially-shaky Jim Crockett Promotions and the WWF was stuck with a lie: instead of someone new, the already-staffed Hacksaw Jim Duggan guested with Brother Love the next Monday.

Something of a TurnerWatch became a quasi-sport in the ensuing weeks. I began to cultivate sources within the key programming divisions of Turner Broadcasting and Turner Home Entertainment in late summer. One Turner executive, who was the first to subscribe to MATWATCH, told me Jim Crockett---who did not talk to wrestling newsletter editors---knew he was not going to be able to hang onto his company if he did not take on a partner. Expenses of the national summer Great American Bash tour had exceeded revenues from usually-large gates. But the Turner source told us the problem with consummating a sale of JCP to Turner were centering around differences of opinion within the family. In the wake of THE's *BASH: THE PRICE FOR FREEDOM* pay-per-view, which was headlined by a Flair-Lex Luger title match, the company had shown signs of a resurgence at the turnstiles, drawing \$350,000 on one three-show weekend in August. In Philadelphia, the NWA had outdrawn the WWF---running head-on across town---for the third straight time. David Crockett and his sister Frances began having second thoughts about selling the company.

But in a meeting before a late August TV taping in Atlanta, Jim Crockett admitted to his wrestlers he would be hard-pressed to make good on promised balloon payments to many of them. Some were owed in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. (For those not accustomed to the term, a balloon contract in business works this way: if you agree to a \$100,000-a-year deal, an employer could pay you \$500-a-week and then owe you the remaining \$74,000 in a balloon payment at the end of the contract. Most of Crockett's top-line performers had been working under such deals in an effort to stem their fleeing to the WWF). Crockett reportedly told his team any of them were on their own as of September 1, but if they would hang with him, he was trying to negotiate a sale of the company. He assured the wrestlers things would improve for them if they would stay with the NWA.

Shortly after Labor Day 1988, a key Turner executive told me the entire sale was in jeopardy and talks were about to cease. Reason: those continuing disagreements within the Crockett family. "This thing has gone on long enough and there are a lot of our people who are getting fed up with it," said the executive, who to this day requests anonymity. Then, the TBS official startled me with another revelation. "We've had a pitch made to us by the World Class group in Texas," said the executive. "And we're listening closely to the Global group down in Florida. If the Crocketts can't make up their minds, we'll certainly consider one of these other two proposals to keep wrestling on TBS." Fritz Von Erich's group had been floundering but still had a solid syndicated TV network, which could be bolstered by Turner Program Sales, and as the number three U.S. promotion in TV exposure, such a pitch made sense. But *Global*? That was the horrible Patrick Schafer-Bob Roop group which stooped so low as to call Gordon Solle an alcoholic on the air after Gordon left to start his own Florida Championship Wrestling. "Do you know anything about these people?" I asked the TBS executive, realizing he was not a student of pro wrestling. "They don't have one wrestler who could draw in front of a national TV audience. You'd be laughed right off the air." The official responded, "Well, they tell us that if they have exposure on TBS and we finance them, they can get these guys away from Crockett." Yeah, boy.

In the process, Ole Anderson, the TBS wrestling guru of the early 1980s, had thrown his name into the pot, saying he could produce the kind of show TBS wanted and give them the talent to draw big ratings without them having to buy a company. Anderson, who had been idle since the early part of the year, had even contacted Pedicino to see if Joe could help him put together a syndication deal. The Anderson proposal did not get very far. Apparently, TBS had not been impressed with how quickly Ole's morning show had faltered as a competitor to the WWF in 1984-85 when Vince McMahon had taken over the coveted 6:05 p.m. slot on the superstation.

The second prime-time *CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS*, led by a Sting-Barry Windham main event, had drawn a strong 5.4 rating in September without Ric Flair. The NWA supercards were proving to be a popular cable draw. But arena attendance for the second round of Flair-Luger rematches was faltering and by late September, the constant barrage of 30-second squash match/90-second interviews on the Saturday *WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING* ushered in a dramatic collapse in what had once been the number one show of any kind on cable television. "The family's beginning to come around," said the TBS executive. "The crowds aren't holding up and they're running out of money. They can't even afford to produce *NWA MAIN EVENT* any more, which is why you've been seeing so many reruns of matches on that show." One bomb, Kevin Sullivan vs. Big Bear Collie, aired four times on the Sunday program. *MAIN EVENT* had been the show Crockett began in April 1988 by promising a \$7,500 bonus to be divided between the main-eventers. "We're getting about \$100, \$150 at best," one NWA wrestler told us in a late-night phone call. "By October, the Saturday ratings had fallen to an all-time low 2.0 for a rare out-of-studio taping in Fayetteville NC.

The departure of Tully Blanchard and Arn Anderson for the WWF in late September was a telling blow for Crockett. I owe Meltzer for the news of that story in *MATWATCH*, which was a late-bulletin add-on to an already-printed issue. Dave called me shortly after the NWA's Philadelphia show: "Tully and Arn jumped. They just dropped the belts in Philly tonight," said Meltzer. "They went in and told Dusty this afternoon. Arn offered to stay around and drop the belts with another partner but Dusty told them no, just to go on." The Midnight Express won the belts in a non-televvised bout that evening which virtually cemented their new role (and Jim Cornette's) as babyfaces.

Everyone from Dave and myself to Dennis Brent of *PRO WRESTLING DIGEST* (who was in Dallas, where Crockett's business was headquartered) to some of the TBS people themselves were monitoring developments. Word had first erroneously leaked that Turner Broadcasting would take over Jim Crockett Promotions Oct. 1, reportedly in a

contract decision which was finalized by fax machine and did not require the formal presence of all parties in Atlanta. However, the day after that report surfaced, my TBS source said it was all premature. "It's going to happen but it will be November 1," said the executive. "There are a lot of fine points to be negotiated: one, we're going to only own two-thirds of the company. This is the way Turner does a lot of ventures by going in to partnership but without buying the entire shares. And, they're having to finalize the time frame payments will be made for the company." I asked who was going to be in charge for Turner. My source said it would be Jack Petrik, the former general manager of WTBS who was now head of Turner Program Sales, the company's syndication division, and supervised Turner Home Entertainment, the pay-per-view and home video division. I decided to give Petrik a call.

Surprisingly, I was patched into Petrik within 30 seconds. I immediately told him who I was, that I was associated with Auburn University, but published a weekly newsletter on pro wrestling and wanted to ask him a few questions about the company's intentions for its mat programming. Petrik was direct and, interestingly, asked a lot of questions. I sensed immediately the man was looking for a lot of independent feedback about wrestling because, whereas this had been a bread-and-butter programming staple for WTBS for nearly 17 years, its ratings were declining for the weekly shows and Turner Broadcasting was about to enter a business it had never tackled: arena promotion. Petrik said he wanted to stay in touch, would call back within two weeks (which he did) and immediately ordered a subscription to *MATWATCH*.

The sale was consummated Nov. 1. *DAILY VARIETY* broke the story nationally, saying the purchase price would be in the "upper seven-figures" and would include Turner Program Sales taking over all distribution for the weekly NWA wrestling series. I was told by my key source Crockett would be retained as general manager and, at least for the time being, Dusty Rhodes would be retained as booker. But neither of those two announced plans would be maintained.

In late November, I made contact with Jeff Carr, a name which is not the most prominent within mat newsletter circles. But he would play a major role in early changes within the NWA and wrestling on TBS. Carr, a program executive for TBS, was assigned the unenviable task of preparing an evaluation on the state of Crockett's wrestling shows and his own proposals on how to improve them as a television entity.

Carr was an affable young redhead who had grown to become a wrestling fan in his role as the key Turner supervisor over the content of the programs. But he didn't like a lot of what he saw. Just as many hardcore fans and newsletter subscribers had been suggesting, Carr saw a lot of sameness in the Crockett shows and was critical of the lack of competitive matches on virtually all TBS shows. Even *NWA MAIN EVENT*, which had promised in its early weeks to be a shining light of Japan-style television, had faltered miserably as Crockett's financial woes grew.

Eventually, Carr's study was translated into a 42-page report. Frankly, after comparing the NWA shows with the style of the WWF, Carr believed the programs sorely needed to move out of the TBS studio but he knew that would increase production costs. Further, he felt the 11 a.m. Saturday morning hour was nothing more than a throwaway show which needed at least one competitive bout and one action-oriented angle a week to attract new viewers. "People aren't going to tune in if they can predict what's going to happen before they turn the set on," Jeff astutely told me. "All of their shows look just alike."

Carr knew he would be stepping on the toes of the reputedly-egotistical senior producer/booker Virgil Runnels. But if TBS was to own the company, changes would have to be made. Little did Carr know he would soon become embroiled in the middle of a situation which would lead him to be unfairly blamed in some quarters for the departure of the lead voice of TBS wrestling since 1985.

"Please hold the line for Jack Petrik," the secretary beckoned on the phone. It was mid-November 1988 and Jack asked if I would be coming to Atlanta any time soon. He'd like to spend a couple of hours with me and talk over my perspective about their wrestling product. As it turned out, I had some business on behalf of Auburn University the first Monday in December and we made the appointment for that day.

Two days later, I received a call from one of those "unnamed" sources that Turner was about to bring in a former television executive from St. Louis to "run the wrestling company." I couldn't call Petrik to confirm because he was in Europe for a week on behalf of the syndication division. Meltzer called later that evening and I related to him my information. "It's gotta be Jim Herd," Dave said. "That's the name that's been buzzing around." I made another couple of calls and learned Herd was still with Pizza Hut but was being told to not confirm anything because he had to remain with the food company until the end of the year to earn vesting in retirement benefits. But I had enough confirmation, so I felt, to report the next week Herd would be appointed to head the Universal Wrestling Corporation division, as the company was being called.

The next week (just before Thanksgiving), my phone rang on Tuesday morning after MATWATCH had arrived in the Turner offices. "How did you get that information?" my source said. "I hate to tell you this but you're right and it's causing some real problems." "Why? Because I'm right?" I asked. "No," the Turner executive said. "They haven't told Crockett yet. Plus, it might help me if you told Jack I wasn't the one who told you because I think he suspects it." "But you didn't tell me," I said. "In fact, I reported it because it was told to me Herd was coming in almost as a nonchalant, surely you know this kind of thing. When are they going to tell Crockett?" "I don't know," he said. "Soon...but just be careful about this. It's real sensitive." "Okay, but if they're going to move out Crockett," I asked, "what about Dusty? A lot of people feel Crockett's real problem has not been Crockett but the fact that he's stuck with Dusty so long as booker. People are getting fed up with all his screw-job finishes at the arenas and you already know about TV." "I can't talk to you about that," I was told. "I can tell you we're moving *STARRCADE* away from Thanksgiving night and we're going to follow your suggestion to move it to the week after Christmas. They didn't want to do it but we (Turner) told them they had to if we were going to clear the cable homes." Just the week before, I had advocated strongly getting the flagship NWA pay-per-view show away from the ridiculous head-to-head competition with the WWF *SURVIVOR SERIES*, where it would surely be trampled, and moving it to the week between Christmas and New Year which could draw a holiday audience and focus more attention on the show.

The week after Thanksgiving brought a tense moment in the early relationship between Dusty Rhodes and Turner Broadcasting. Dusty had told some his troops, "I guess I'm gonna have to 'press some people," referring to initial criticism of his all-squash TV formats. So, he began to incorporate hot angles into the Saturday show, beginning with a Jim Cornette and the Midnight Express being surprise-attacked by the Original Midnight Express (Dennis Condrey and Randy Rose) and Paul E. Dangerously and following up the next week with a studio brawl between Bam Bam Bigelow and Barry Windham.

But the Monday after the holiday nearly cost TBS Ric Flair, considered vital to their purchase of majority interest in Jim Crockett Promotions. Several possibilities had been discussed for the main event of *STARRCADE*. But the one Rhodes was pushing would see Flair drop his NWA belt to the fast-rising comic character of Rick Steiner. Flair, whom TBS had offered \$15,000-a-week and creative control over the NWA world championship, balked and walked out of the meeting, vociferously stating his intention to leave for the WWF.

The next morning, my TBS source called. "Jack convinced Ric to stay but it's taken a lot of coaxing," he said. "I don't know what's going to happen but I believe either Ric or

Ric or Dusty is going to have to go. I know which one you'd vote for." True, I was on the verge of editorializing for TBS to name Flair booker, believing, from what I had been told, it would be an insurance policy to hang onto the six-time world champion. I would come full circle on that idea within a year, when I understood clearly why Dave Meltzer disagreed with my stand. But that very weekend, Rhodes would make TBS' decision easy.

At TBS studio tapings the next night, Rhodes would stage his now-infamous "spike-in-the-eye" angle, in which the Road Warriors would use a spike in an attempt to "put Dusty's eye out." The angle, still rather graphic for the dinner hour, immediately incensed Jeff Carr, the TBS executive in charge of production. Petrik was not amused, either. When the angle aired, it was too much for the TBS brass, sensitive people to viewer complaints about violence. Rhodes was summarily dismissed as booker but retained as a wrestler.

My appointment with Petrik was at 10 a.m. the morning of Dec. 12, 1989, just after the airing of *SEASON'S BEATINGS* the third prime-time *CLASH* special, which was seen in 2.07 million homes. The 14th floor of CNN Center is awe-inspiring in itself. The Christmas trees in the waiting area livened up a bit of an antiseptic look. As I was ushered into an executive office with a gorgeous view of the skyline of Atlanta.

Steve Chamberlain, Turner Home Entertainment vice president--whom I had met by phone--chatted with us briefly about the upcoming *STARRCADE* and the good numbers of the *CLASH*. After Chamberlain left, Jack began what evolved into a two-hour exchange. Even I was stunned at the length.

We must have discussed at least 40 wrestlers, some with Crockett, some with the WWF and others in Japan or with top independents. Petrik asked about the British Bulldogs, who were out of the WWF, and Ted DiBiase, who was very much in. I mentioned Owen Hart, Big Van Vader, Super Black Ninja (the name Keiji Mutoh was using in World Class), Brian Pillman, Cactus Jack, the Samoan Swat Team and Chris Benoit. I also expressed concern about importing Junkyard Dog and questioned how much longer Ivan Koloff and Paul Jones could effectively continue. We immediately talked about the Ricky Steamboat situation. I told Jack many hardcore fans were excited about Steamboat's announced return and then let down when the deal was apparently not consummated. "Jim (Crockett) was supposed to get that settled last week but he hasn't told me how that's coming," said Petrik. "But we do intend to have him in by January."

The one thing which impressed me was how Jack asked a lot of questions. He would occasionally mention certain recommendations which had been made him by some of the Crockett people and I would tell him how the fan viewed their marquee value. Jack seemed intent for the NWA to take on a sports-oriented presentation as contrast to the comic book world of the WWF and felt it would be the right counterattack. Jack also asked about announcers and this is when I ventured the view Jim Ross was far and away the top announcer in the business and was being held back as the "number two" by Crockett. "He can be in the '90s what Gordon Solie was for you in the '70s and early '80s," I said. At the time, I had never met or talked to Ross, only been attracted to his enthusiastic announce style from the days of those mid-1980s UWF classic showclosers. I also mentioned the innovations Joe Pedicino had brought to wrestling on television in Atlanta and told Petrik Joe should be one person who should be interviewed.

Jack did not shy away from the Dusty situation. "We had to make a decision which was not easy but one, nonetheless, which was necessary," said Petrik. "Dusty was apparently intent on putting the kind of scene on the air which is against the standards for Turner Broadcasting and we just can't have that. We definitely want him to remain as a wrestler but he will no longer be the booker. For now, Crockett is going to handle that for us."

Jack shared how initial reports of major benefits for TBS wrestlers were premature. The company was not, in fact, working on a tradeout with a major hotel for regular lodging. Neither would the wrestlers be considered TBS employees; instead, they would work for the Universal Wrestling subsidiary but the company had determined health insurance premiums would be prohibitively expensive. Nevertheless, TBS was prepared to open its pocketbooks to be a competitor with Vince McMahon for top talent.

Before leaving, I expressed two other key views. One, my opinion that Sting was the most popular talent in the company---including Flair---and was the organization's future. I told Jack I felt Rhodes had failed to capitalize on Sting's surging following after the ratings record-setting Flair-Sting title match at the first *CLASH*. Further, if there was an underutilized talent, both on the air and in a creative capacity, it was Jim Cornette. "The man has one of the most brilliant minds in wrestling," I said. "You have to use him---and, frankly, he's ready to be a regular color commentator if you can tone down his hyperventilation." Jack made notes.

As I departed, Jack expressed optimism about what Jim Herd would bring to the company. "He's a good man," said Petrik. "It will take him a little time to get his feet wet but he's the kind of man we need to get some of the problems corrected. You'll like him. After he's had a chance to get himself ingrained, I'd like to have you back up and the three of us should have lunch together." I thanked him. We never had the lunch but the day was the first of what I consider a valued relationship, even now that I am out of the weekly newsletter business.

Next to the Turner/Crockett deal, the most significant news centered around the Verne Gagne-Jerry Jarrett pay-per-view. The two had shared talent on ESPN for several weeks leading up to their December cable special, to be headlined by a Jerry Lawler (AWA) vs. Kerry Von Erich (World Class) unification title match. About the best thing which could be said for the show is the behind-the-scenes bickering was akin to splitting the group into two Germanys.

The wrestlers were predominantly unhappy. Most of them worked for \$30 guarantees, the cheapest payoff for any pay-per-view show to date. FNN/SCORE, which had backed the pay-per-view in partnership with Gagne, was having trouble with the AWA boss as the show date approached. Then, the lid came off when Von Erich was told before the show he was dropping his belt to Lawler. According to an FNN official who was backstage, Kerry did everything from threaten to go to the WWF to vow not to go out against Lawler. The finish was an adaptation of a Dusty Rhodes teleplay. Von Erich, who was juicing heavily, was in a position of rallying and had Lawler down on the mat when the referee inspected Kerry's cut and stopped the match, awarding it and the "unified" belt to Lawler.

In the end, the show---which only cleared five million homes---drew only an 0.5 per cent buy-rate and was a financial bust. The next morning, I called Dennis Brent's Dallas office to see if he had seen the show. James "Percy Pringle" Woody, who was then working for Brent, answered the phone. "Yeah, Steve, I saw it. And, to tell you the truth, it was the s--ts." Leave it to Percy to cut right through the mustard.

Of course, within two months, Jarrett and Gagne had a final falling-out with Lawler refusing to return the "unified" belt. Gagne gave his son-in-law Larry Zbyszko a new AWA title in a battle royal and announcer Lee Marshall attempted to bury Lawler on the air. Lawler countered by declaring Gagne a "senile old man" on his Memphis TV show. Late last year, during his split with the USWA, Eddie Gilbert offered this observation: "The biggest mistake Verne Gagne ever made was letting Lawler win that unified belt because Lawler and Jerry Jarrett never had any intention of giving that belt back. But most of the newsletter readers didn't like Verne and they bought that senile old man theory, so he came out the heel." It was enough to make Dick Vitale yell, "Gimme a T.O., bay-bee, gimme a T.O.!"

The phone rang a bit after 11:00 p.m. at my home in Auburn AL. "Dusty and J.J. are terrified of you," the voice explained. Yeah, and the Titanic didn't sink. "No, really! You just stirred up another one and you didn't even know it." As it turns out, Jack Petrik's subscription to MATWATCH was telling him things he didn't know and some he didn't like. As Jack said, when he introduced me to his wife the next year in Atlanta, "All you have to do is pick up MATWATCH and you'll learn things you don't even know about your own company." Petrik was being facetious but almost a throwaway line in a mid-December portion of what we then called COMINGS & GOINGS bothered him. James J. Dillon, who as assistant booker handled travel arrangements for Crockett, had left both hot managers Jim Cornette and Paul E. Dangerously off the cards of several road shows in the East. Paul Heyman was so determined for this stint to be a career-making venture, he even volunteered to drive to the arenas from his New York home. Somehow, a Midnight Express vs. Original Midnight Express series would be like tasting stale potato chips without the antagonists at ringside. I knew. Crockett had taped a virtually dead two hours of TV in Columbus GA in early December and all that saved the show was when Cornette and Dangerously, in the evening's dark finale, rolled up their sleeves like two old Georgia politicians and tore the house apart.

The furor started when Barry Windham handed out plane tickets after a Wednesday night show. There were no tickets for Cornette or Dangerously. "Sorry, guys, I didn't have anything to do with this," Windham reportedly told the omitted managers. The suspicion was Dillon, who lacked a strong personality as manager of Crockett's Four Horsemen, was leaving off his younger counterparts in an effort to cool them off and keep himself in the forefront of the NWA. Petrik read the item in MATWATCH and immediately reversed the Dillon shenanigans. "Dusty and J.J. figured out where Petrik found out about it because they know he takes your newsletter and that's the only way," said the source. I learned when Jack saw something he felt was interesting in any bulletin, he often yellow-lined it and sent it down to the wrestling people, at times asking, "Why aren't we doing this?"

Jim Crockett was finally introduced to Jim Herd and, according to all reports, the meeting did not go well. Herd had been advised by St. Louis friends Sam Muchnick and Larry Matyszyk the two would not blend like peanut butter and jelly. To be honest, if I had been Crockett, I would have reacted the same way. Here was a company my father had built and changing economics in the business had forced me to sell out to a conglomerate. They tell me I'm going to continue to run it and no sooner than they take over than this white-haired man in a suit is brought in to nudge me out. One MATWATCH source inside TBS puts it even bolder: "They lied to Crockett. They absolutely lied. They led him to believe he would still be in charge and they knew all along they were bringing in Jim Herd, or at least somebody else. Welcome to the world of television." Heck, I had been through the same thing 11 years before. I was co-anchor of *ACTION 9 NEWS* in Columbus and the ratings had jumped to the point that we were outdrawing the CBS station at 11 p.m. But we weren't moving up fast enough in the earlier time period. A new news director was recruited. The second week in, he told me, "The audience research looks very good on you." Optimistic, right? Four weeks later, I was told a more "mature" anchor was being brought in (a guy I later hired away when I became news director of WSAV in Savannah GA). You learn quickly, it's all business.

Crockett reportedly yelled for a half-hour before calming. As much of a firebrand as Herd is, I would have loved to have been a fly on the wall. Nonetheless, the Herd regime would begin in January. He had been a director for some of Vince McMahon Sr.'s old WWF shows, was an executive at the St. Louis indie station which carried wrestling and had most recently been a marketing executive for a group of midwestern Pizza Hut restaurants. But as he would soon discover, selling wrestling in the 1990s would be a different proposition from selling thick-crust pan pizzas.

Chapter Three

Eleven Weeks of George and The Lie Detector Dare

As 1989 began, optimism was up among people who sought an alternative from the WWF circus, which was still riding high but coasting a bit on inertia. The clamor from MATWATCHers was, naturally, for Bill Watts to be hired as NWA booker, though Dave Meltzer suggested Jim Cornette would be creatively strong, if the wrestlers would take direction from a non-grappler. Watts' old Mid-South Wrestling had once been the number one show on cable television in its Sunday night slot on TBS. His evolution into the Universal Wrestling Federation had captured strong syndication ratings in more than 100 markets. But TBS did not exactly see it that way.

Jack Petrik told me Watts was not high on the list to be imported. "I know his show drew a big audience but it was just too violent. There was just so much violence and blood on his shows," said Petrik. I countered the opinion that while Watts used a lot of blood, his strength was his knowledge of the action side of wrestling and his ability to use television for sports soap opera. Further, while I had never met Watts, I felt he would be able to work within the parameters set for him by TBS. Nonetheless, I came away realizing Bill Watts would not be booker.

So then, who? Ole Anderson? Not likely. He hadn't been able to get inside the door for his proposal to create a new independent group for TBS. Eddie Gilbert? Probably the second most popular grass roots choice but Eddie was still regarded as either too young or "one of Watts' boys" by the old-guard NWA wrestlers who hated the UWF. Crockett? Frankly, as interim booker, he had produced a thoroughly-entertaining *STARRCADE* in December, led by a surprisingly strong Flair-Luger title match. And Crockett was leaning toward a committee of himself, Gilbert, Dangerously, Cornette and at least one other. But TBS wanted a clean break of the Crockett regime.

Not in my wildest imagination did I even consider George Scott. I had remembered Scott from the early 1960s, when he and brother Sandy were called the "Flying Scotts" and dominated the Carolinas-Virginia territory of Jim Crockett Sr. In the late 1960s, George worked as a single (occasionally dubbed "Great Scott") in Georgia but faded against the likes of Nick Bockwinkel and Paul DeMarco. He had booked for Crockett in the mid-1970s when Johnny Valentine and Blackjack Mulligan were on top and Ric Flair was the rising star. In the early days of McMahon's national explosion, Scott was line booker and was given exaggerated credit for a number of the initial WWF talent

raids of the NWA. Yet, Scott's WWF tenure was plagued with frequent no-shows and discipline problems among the wrestlers. After being bounced from Titan Sports in 1985, Scott was hired by Fritz Von Erich to run World Class and reportedly had worked a talent-sharing agreement with the WWF. The deal lasted for all of one card, which Ricky Steamboat appeared on, and Scott was out of WCCW in 13 weeks.

Dennis Brent called from Dallas to tell me of Scott's appointment. "I still don't believe it. George Scott fired Jim Ross once before. Jim's not thrilled about it. I don't think too many of the guys are," said Brent. Four other calls came in within the next two hours and none of them were too positive. I honestly tried to reserve judgment until I had a chance to see what kind of changes Scott would make.

McMahon, meanwhile, was planning to do battle with Turner in February. Though publicly declaring he did not consider the NWA serious competition, McMahon began a series of what Herd would describe as "predatory practices." The WWF boss had been hot ever since Turner opted to go head-on against his 1988 *WRESTLEMANIA* with the first *CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS*. The Flair-Sting main event on TBS drew the largest audience ever for a wrestling match up to that time on cable television and cost McMahon serious dollars for his subscription special.

Turner Home Entertainment would produce *CHI-TOWN RUMBLE*, an oddly-named event because it came only a month after McMahon's *ROYAL RUMBLE* and was a reminder of the critically-panned 1987 *STARRCADE* show, *CHI-TOWN HEAT*. Scheduled on a Monday night during two of the three hours of McMahon's regular USA Network *PRIME TIME WRESTLING*, McMahon would counterprogram with *FACE TO FACE*, a debate-oriented special which would launch the promotional offensive for the 1989 *WRESTLEMANIA*. *FACE* laid an egg as a television show but still drew a 3.5 rating opposite the NWA pay special.

The WWF needed something to get itself untracked. While still the unquestioned leader in the field, Titan Sports was slipping in pay subscriptions. The January *ROYAL RUMBLE* would draw the lowest buy-rate in WWF history, a lackluster effort which saw the returning Big John Studd win the *RUMBLE* as a babyface.

George Scott's introduction to the now-TBS wrestlers was not exactly like a New Year's Eve celebration in Times Square. Scott had a rather cold-fish, emotionless personality to the group gathered in Atlanta. Kevin Sullivan went up to him and said, "If you need any help, George, you can count on me." Scott virtually ignored him. Paul Heyman went up to introduce himself and said, "They call me Paul E. Dangerously." Scott just looked at Paul and said, "George Scott."

Scott had a plan to, as he told the troops, "re-educate the fans about wrestling." Only problem was: they didn't want his course. Scott's idea of wrestling was a series of 15-to-30 minute matches with 80 per cent restholds. Maybe in 1974 but not in 1989. A classic sample for you tape collectors is to go back and view the *CHI-TOWN RUMBLE* match between Sting and Butch Reed, second one on the show. You won't find any more of a textbook example of a George Scott-booked match than this. A 22-minute bout which seemed like 40. See if you recognize any of the personalities of Sting or Reed in that one.

Rebecca and I saw our first live inauguration Jan. 20, 1989. We accompanied, as chaperones, the Auburn University band—which was Alabama's official band in the inaugural parade for President Bush. As we were traveling on the 18th to Washington, Ricky Steamboat was making his homecoming to the NWA and Scott was conducting his first TBS taping.

Scott made one decisively correct move for his premiere. He changed plans of bringing in Steamboat under a mask as "Mr. X." Eddie Gilbert had been building the arrival of a mystery partner to assist him in his war against Ric Flair and Barry Windham. Talk about getting someone over. You could see the Gilbert mind and ring psychology meshing during the weeks leading up to "the match." I don't know if Gilbert and Steamboat ever again teamed. But Eddie was the right man to sell the return. Sell his head off did Gilbert in the bout against Flair and Windham, then set up Steamboat for his dragonfly finish and pin of Flair to pop the TBS studio crowd. It wasn't until the next week that we saw the kind of wrestling about which Scott wanted to reteach us.

If someone told me "pick your dream job, Steve," I would want to have Rudy Martzke's job for *USA TODAY*. I can think of nothing any more outright fun than to actually be paid to watch sports on television, analyze their presentation, evaluate the announcers and review the "best and worst" of every weekend on the tube. Reading Rudy is like scouring a printed version of *THE GEORGE MICHAEL SPORTS MACHINE*. The first time Martzke threw in Lines of the Week and the ever-present Dreaded Glitch Award, I was hooked. As a broadcaster, I genuinely watched sports on TV in much the same way as he wrote about them. Only no publication had ever given a columnist a daily slot to review the broadcasts rather than the coaches and players.

So if you wonder about the prototype for MATWATCH, it's Rudy. And that has been the most wearying part of doing the newsletter for four years. It's my fault. I locked myself into the format and it's what most of you MATWATCHers grew to expect. Yes, I did watch virtually every show offered in my area on a given weekend. Others, I would try to scan---thanks to Steve Sims, David Williamson and others---on tape a week late.

In a sense, I tried to structure the Idiots section in the pattern of your daily paper's sports agate, where you get the baseball box scores, standings and golf tourney updates. Occasionally, a reader would suggest we were wasting space with it but I heard from about six times as many subscribers who used the weekly TV results as a guide for which shows to trade for videotapes. So, I tried to listen to the majority.

Even though I have always enjoyed being a competitive reporter for breaking stories, my fondness has been for the profiles of broadcasters and stories to educate how television works behind-the-scenes. It is my field and is what I wanted to place the prime focus on for MATWATCH.

One of the most-asked questions in letters and in person has been, "Do you think the announcers or wrestlers deliberately try to get a 'Line of the Week?'" Not as a rule. A broadcaster's job is to communicate with the audience, whether it's wrestling, news, sports or being a game show host. If his concentration is on anything else, he is falling down on the job. Jim Ross' best calls have been in matches where there was not one cute line. Go back to his classic: the 1989 Flair-Steamboat Chicago match. Ross was exuding the same intensity as Dick Enberg at a Super Bowl. True, with some of wrestling's best comedians, MATWATCH became a subtle part of the culture. Jim Cornette had great fun with it during the recent LPWA pay-per-view nobody saw. More than once, Jim joked with Joe Pedicino, "That'll get a Line of the Week....that'll get on the All-Cliche Team."

Ah, the dreaded All-Cliche Team. That's a Rudy Martzke, to be sure. Every Monday, you can count on Rudy to drill holes in the worn-out lines of commentators, usually an "only time will tell," an "all she wrote," or an "anything can happen on a given Sunday." No less an authority than ABC's Al Michaels will tell you whether his peers admit to it, they clamor for Rudy's Monday column to be sure they didn't make the All-Cliche Team or their broadcast didn't get a Dreaded Glitch Award. If there's one element of MATWATCH Rossie hated, it was the All-Cliche Team because he would occasionally make the Team. He now covers himself after uttering a traditional phrase (and he says very few now) with the words "as the old cliché goes." I'm still trying to break Pedicino

of the cliché, "What's good for the goose is good for the gander." Craig Johnson did pay attention after making the Team quite often during his early USWA days. Paul E. had an early habit of "discretion is the better part of valor." Gorilla Monsoon has uttered "close but no cigar" enough, the phrase should have long been retired. Cliches make for poor communication because they show a lack of originality. When original phrases are repeated more than a dozen times, or so, they become clichés. The bulk of Ric Flair's interviews are clichés because he's been using the same half-dozen catchphrases for seven years.

Before wrestling interviews became so sophisticated, the bulk of babyfaces would clutter their comments with "talk is cheap...action speaks louder than words." Or if it was a brother team, the dreaded "blood is thicker than water." When Bob Armstrong first said, "I'm gonna rub you in the kind of dirt Ajax won't take off," it was refreshing. After 15 years of the same line on every other interview, it became a cliché. Probably the one guy who could get away with a cliché is Freddie Blassie because it never gets old to hear him call someone a "pencil-necked geek." My friend, Ed Capral, the retired Georgia announcer, was allegedly the first ever to have that label pinned on by Blassie.

After four years of being a fan, I finally met Jim Ross in Columbus at George Scott's first NWA syndication TV taping Feb. 13, 1989. One week from *CHI-TOWN RUMBLE*, two nights from a *CLASH* in Cleveland which, on paper, offered the worst lineup of any TBS special to date. Joe and Boni Blackstone had driven Ross down from Atlanta. I came the 40 minutes from Auburn. Fred Ward, the veteran Columbus promoter and my old friend from my years as an anchor in the Fountain City, came over to hug my neck.

Joe was not yet on the NWA staff but he stayed in the dressing room with Scott for most of the show, watching on a monitor. I remember seeing the obviously-irritated face of David Crockett every time his eyes would meet Joe's. Ross could take it easy. This was the first attempt at a new WWF-style taping format of continuous matches, 22 of them, to be post-produced and voiced over later in an announce booth. But the show was weird. Scott was pairing people who had never teamed before: Michael Hayes and Ivan Koloff, Eddie Gilbert and Vincent Young (Joe Scarpa's son Mark, who Eddie had used as Private Pyle in Continental) and Danny Spivey as a new member of the Varsity Club. Spivey came out in a University of Georgia letterman's jacket and I can tell you, not a dozen people in the place remembered Spivey ever playing for Vince Dooley.

Ross and I immediately hit it off. We had a lot in common as broadcasters, but Jim also had other interests than wrestling which matched mine. Jim expressed appreciation for our support of him in *MATWATCH*, something I assured him was not necessary. He began telling me how he felt Scott "would probably be pretty good" and just "needed a little time to get his program installed." But Ross was qualifying his words enough, it appeared he was attempting to convince himself about George as much as me.

Jim, Joe, Boni and I left the show early but not before Pedicino trotted Scott out to meet me. I didn't know where this would lead. I had been prepped how George hated newsletters and felt they were a cancer to the mat business. I was new to the game but I just decided to be myself. Scott and I had a friendly conversation. We watched a match where Eddie Gilbert came out with the third different partner of the evening and George was concerned with how the jobbers were selling. "It's going to take a long time to get things where we want them," said Scott. "Old habits die hard (All-Cliche Team) and this thing was in a total mess." George wasn't very specific, nor did he share with me his plan to clean up the mess. But he was polite enough and, like Ross, I tried to convince myself he was on the right track. I wasn't told until we were at Shoney's for supper later but Pedicino and Ross were getting a huge chuckle during my conversation with Scott. "David Crockett must have passed by you and George a half-dozen times in 15 minutes," said Pedicino. "Yeah," said Ross, "it was like he was saying with his face, 'Three months ago, this was my company and now the booker's talking to a sheetwriter.'"

If you ask me, the best wrestling interviewees of the last 25 years have been Nick Bockwinkel, Arn Anderson, Tim Woods and Cowboy Bill Watts. Why? They are all communicators. These four are able to weave an unscripted phrase and sentence as a carpenter crafts a closet door. Bockwinkel never had to yell an interview. He could display that calm, trademark arrogance which made him a "cool" heel. I never heard it make a grammatical error. Anderson doesn't have a great voice. But his interviews are as if they've been constructed by a great speechwriter. Rarely are any two the same. The closest he's ever come to a cliché is when he would formerly repeat, "Pardon me for tooting my own horn but toot...toot." Woods had a broadcaster's voice and could explain the technical side of wrestling in layman's terms as effectively as any color commentator, not in the encyclopaediae of John Heath. Watts could have been a great news anchorman. He has that rare ability to literally reach out and grab the camera by the throat and make you listen. Watts speaks with intelligence and grace, yet with a strong volume and varied inflection. All avoid the time-worn phrase.

I teach my reporters and college students almost from the start to eliminate the cliché and develop their own analogies to create freshness. If I ever had the job of coaching announcers and color commentators, that's where I would begin--noting every cliché and making the guys study them until they were like a bad dream. I hope perhaps the lesson has rubbed off on a few of the commentators who read MATWATCH. If so, it's been worth the effort.

Tony Schiavone had come a long way since his days as a baseball announcer for the Crockett family's Charlotte Orioles. His first TV mat exposure came in 1983 as a green interviewer with shoulder-length hair on Crockett's cut-ins for local town cards on syndicated shows. When he premiered on TBS in April 1985, he had two strikes against him: one, he unceremoniously replaced the Turner mike legend for 12 years, Gordon Solie. No announcement. No farewell. No passing the torch. Only a half-hearted comment during a first-week interview from Tully Blanchard: "Tony Schiavone--the guy picked to replace Gordon Solie." Two, David Crockett. The younger brother of Jim Crockett had long been the butt of jokes within the newsletter industry. His personality often grated on viewers and Crockett had an annoying habit of yelling, "We gotta go!" when Rhodes would produce a show in which a main event match would just be starting as a show would go off the air. Sharing the mike with Crockett often restricted Schiavone's talents. Not until the addition of former UWF commentator Jim Ross in January 1988 did Schiavone begin to flourish.

When Pedicino went to CNN Center for his first formal interview with Jim Herd, the new NWA chief shared with Joe he knew he had the two best announcers in wrestling. But he was going to split them. One would go to syndication. The other would be the prime voice of TBS. Enter Jeff Carr.

Carr was outright asked if he had a choice for the top announcer on TBS, would he pick Ross or Schiavone. "Ross," Carr said. But Jeff had no animosity or distaste for Tony. But, as in any broadcasting business, news travels fast. At a TV taping only two days before Herd divided Ross and Schiavone, Tony approached Carr. "Jeff," said Schiavone, "I understand you want me off TBS. Could you give me any reason why?" Carr explained it wasn't a matter of him wanting to get rid of Schiavone--he was simply asked to make a choice and he simply felt Ross was the stronger personality. But Schiavone was not appeased. The next week when the first Schiavone solo versions of *WORLD WIDE WRESTLING* and *NWA PRO WRESTLING* were taped in Marietta, Pedicino said, "Schiavone did not look happy the entire evening." Irony was the fact that Schiavone would be seen in more homes than the TBS shows. But that didn't diminish his feeling of demotion. In a matter of weeks, Schiavone would accept, then reject, a deal to keep his new assignment.

Some weeks, I told Jim Cornette he was disqualified from the Lines of the Week category. He is the archetype comedy phrasemaker and would often dominate the MATWATCH Lines in a single three-minute interview. Heaven forbid he become a color commentator. My favorite Cornette lines are still from the interview he did during the 1988 Presidential race: "Bush and Quayle---remind me of a companion magazine to *FIELD AND STREAM*. Dukakis and Bentsen---sounds like a new brand of powersaw." When I returned from Bush's inauguration, I sent Cornette a copy of *Field and Stream* with a Bush/Quayle inaugural button pinned to the magazine.

That Terry Funk Texas drawl can break me up at earshot. An hour after he engineered that fabulous attack on Flair in Nashville in the spring of '89, he was delivering an interview for the next week's TV which had me in such stitches, I was afraid security would have to escort me from backstage. When Terry bellowed, "Ric Flair, you go to the ring like Barbara Bush with anorexia. You look just like Phyllis Diller in drag," I lost it. Yes, the Barbara comment was the top Line of the Week in the next issue.

Paul E. Dangerously was the master of the shock value line but he could let fly with some of the most subtle humor imaginable. Only months after Dusty Rhodes' ill-fated return of himself as the masked Midnight Rider, Paul pulled the ultimate mockery on the angle. A storyline had Continental considering banning Paul E. and Eddie for their shenanigans. Said Paul: "If we get banned by the CWF, then Hot Stuff Eddie Gilbert is coming right back in here the next week as The Midnight Rider."

Lance Russell was always believable when he'd spout off, "Tojo, I'll sue you," in Memphis. But my favorite Lance line came on his first *WORLD WIDE* show in 1989: "Little Rock, Arkansas—I was born there *one time*."

Jerry Lawler is the best insult line artist in the business---yes, even better than Bobby Heenan because his rhythm is a shade quicker. Telling Don Bass, "I heard you lost a lot of weight...turn around and you'll find it." Or telling a female valet: "Your face would stop an eight-day clock."

Sean Mooney is not a champion phrasemaker and even his delivery of a good line is a bit stiff because the WWF's show is too scripted. But Mooney did home with, "If the Heenan Family were in the Boy Scouts, I'd skip the camping trip."

A favorite from the late Tojo Yamamoto was of the self-deprecating variety. "Want statue of Tojo?" he asked. "Not hard. Just get Buddha doll and cut off hair."

During the waning days of the first Dusty regime on TBS, Ross had to resort to humor to just to get through all of those Saturday squash matches. A memorable line with a sight gag came when Paul Jones came out with Jack Victory and Dave Shekdon as the Russian Assassins. TBS found this grim Soviet-sounding music for the Assassins (which, incidentally, CNN used over its special reports of the attempted coup in the former Soviet Union last summer). After about three weeks, Ross let go with: "Well, here it is again: The Kremlin's Greatest Hits. Call your 1-800 operator and allow four to six weeks for delivery."

Timing is a key to Michael Hayes' lines, which I always felt made him a great mike partner for Ross. A favorite Hayes line was to Lex Luger: "You're just like 7UP. Never had it...never will."

Surprisingly articulate is Dutch Mantel, who can turn a wry line like a slashing knife: "Women invented PMS because men invented ESPN." Or "The only way I could get a divorce is if my wife found a lawyer in the mall."

Some of Jesse Ventura's best lines are prefaced with a question: "What do these people in Fort Wayne know? Dan Quayle's their senator."

Then, there are the sappy lines. Such as the one from the old series *LEARNING THE ROPES*, when Lyle Alzado asked an injured Jimmy Garvin: "What are you good at besides being Gorgeous?" Garvin answered, "I wanted to be a vet. But I figured why be a vet? I already work with animals."

But it's hard to top a Cornetteism: "When they stripped Ben Johnson of his gold medal, he said, 'Hey, man! I didn't take no stereos!'"

Joe Pedicino went to work for the NWA in February 1989. He made it very plain to Herd and several others that he and I had been friends for nearly three years and he was not going to revoke that friendship. But I can truthfully say Pedicino never leaked a story to me he was told was confidential. I would often mention something to him and he would say, "How did you find out about that?"

However, Joe had two major strikes against him: 1) he never "played the game." For that fact, neither had Ross or Schiavone but both had come up through the ranks in wrestling organizations; and 2) the old guard NWA veterans considered him a "teech" who crashed the party by creating *PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK*, the first and virtually only nationally syndicated mat newsmagazine which featured clips of as many as a dozen different alliances in one episode. Joe knew television and sales but he wasn't a "wrestling guy" to many of them. Plus, they would deride him because of his size. Those of us closest to Pedicino worry about his weight at his age and he knows I will periodically needle him to get it off to preserve his health (I once had to haul him to an emergency clinic after he complained of esophageal pains).

Nevertheless, Pedicino bore right into his *Joe Pedicino Knows...* segments (Dangerously always called it *Joe Pedicino's Nose*) and other duties. He was designed to be Everyfan, in much the same way as he was on *PWTW* and his Atlanta marathon show. He bought an atlas to do research for the segments on the various cities the NWA would visit. He organized the first (and, to my knowledge, only) shopping mall signing event (in Nashville, the day before *WRESTLE WAR I*), which drew 6,000 people.

Joe had a lot of unconventional ideas---some good and some which probably would not have worked. But as much as the NWA needed change, it wasn't ready for some of his proposals---though many of them have shown up on the air since he left in 1990.

The average *MATWATCH* week would be at its heaviest on Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday in the early going. In the first two years, I would conventionally be home at 5 p.m. and could relax a bit, work on *MATWATCH* a couple of hours in the evening and answer a few calls (that schedule definitely changed when I went back into television). But the bulk of the writing would commence Thursday night. Boni Blackstone would call me with the results of the TV shows not offered in my area carried on her Atlanta Saturday night series. That would get the *Vidlots* (then called *TV Tempo*) going. Friday night, I would typically write my column and secondary-length stories of the week (yes, some weeks a late-breaker on Saturday or Sunday would change the whole focus of things). Saturday, the day would begin around 9 to catch the first of the syndicated shows on the Auburn cable system (if I remember correctly, we were offered 18 shows at the time I began *MATWATCH*---including a Monday-through-Friday strip on a Columbus independent). I would be watching wrestling on Saturday off-and-on past midnight, logging as many Line of the Week and Strongest Comment entries as I could and judging closely the production values of the shows. The job wasn't simplified until we were computerized.

Late-night telephone calls are a way of life if you publish a successful wrestling newsletter. That's when the sources are most available and reflective. I realized after the first 13 weeks or so a second phone line would be mandatory. Rebecca was awakened too many evenings past midnight by our single line and, as a graduate student, she needed her rest. An answering machine was the next step---and as you will later discover---a serious headache.

As many of you know, subscribers regularly call, desperate to grasp a glimmer of the latest gossip before the next issue arrives. It is not a difficult proposition to answer those calls when you only have 50 to 100 subscribers. But when the number exceeded 500 and later 1,000, one does not have the financial resources to return every reader's call. Nor the time. Some people do not understand that. But most normal humans have to have a life beyond wrestling. I hope I fall into that category.

The consensus, even within WWF headquarters, was that *FACE TO FACE* laid an egg, even though it drew a strong rating. The week before *CHI-TOWN RUMBLE*, Ross told us how contract negotiations were going with NWA stars. McMahon clearly wanted Flair, whose NWA pact expired April 1, 1989. Ross had driven Flair to a hotel a couple of weeks earlier and Ric told Jim Vince was promising the NWA champion a bundle of dough and the WWF world belt to jump. Asking what Ross thought, Jim said he told Ric, "Well, it's something you can't sneeze at. You have to consider it." Ric's wife, Beth, related a similar proposal to Dave Meltzer in Chicago but Dave insisted to Beth that "Vince will never give Ric the belt." Probably, at that time, Dave was right.

George Scott was sold on Sting, he liked Lex Luger, the Road Warriors were definitely penciled in and it was essential to re-sign Flair (which Turner did). But Scott wasn't crazy about Jim Cornette or the Midnight Express. He simply didn't believe a manager could be a successful fan favorite, an issue Cornette pointed up in Columbus as he left the ring to huge cheers with Bobby Eaton and Stan Lane after a TV match. He high-fived me and yelled, "These babyface managers just can't get over, can they, Steve?"

Scott, little-by-little, began to import faces which had burned out in the WWF and been cut. Butch Reed, who later revived himself as part of Doom, was hardly a hot property when he was signed by Turner. When Herd told me, "We just shook hands with the Iron Sheik this afternoon," I thought he was joking. Literally.

The slow pacing of Scott's matches was boring the audience. Once-hot arenas, already worn down by excessive screw-job finishes from the last year of Rhodes' bookings, collapsed. After a crowd of only 500 turned up in Dayton, former newsletter editor Bob Closson called Pedicino and pleaded, "Tell me it's going to get better." Closson's view was shared by scores of hardcore fans who genuinely wanted the NWA to right itself and be a competitor with McMahon.

Jeff Carr made one move in January 1989 which was not popular with a number of wrestling fans and particularly not with Jack Petrik. Wrestling had dominated the 6 p.m. hour on Atlanta's Channel 17 since 1972. It was almost as much of a sacrilege to tamper with the time period as it was if ABC ever had to move *THE LAWRENCE WELK SHOW* in its heyday.

Based on declining ratings for wrestling and a lucrative deal with the amateur sports unions for track-and-field, AAU wrestling, swimming and winter events, Carr took the step to move the venerable *WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING*, once cable's dominant show, to 7:05 p.m. (EST) and insert *U.S. OLYMPIC GOLD* in the 6:05 slot.

At first, the move didn't seem major. As Jeff believed, "Wrestling fans will follow wrestling whenever it's on." But in the East, younger viewers who sought to party on Saturday nights were largely sacrificing the show's second hour, which now didn't end until 9:05 p.m. Plus, the Olympic show rarely drew as high as a 1 rating, severely cramping the lead-in audience for *WCW*. And coming in the spring, Atlanta Braves Saturday night games would force wrestling all over the TBS schedule, sometimes as late as 11:30 p.m. Carr's experiment was not working and Petrik was irritated. Jack went to Ted Turner personally to have *WCW* restored to its traditional 6:05 time.

Turner Broadcasting made a decision which sent shock waves throughout the cable industry. After Vince McMahon challenged *CHI-TOWN RUMBLE* with *FACE TO FACE*, he then tried to talk cable operators into an exclusivity window which would have, effectively, forced Turner Home Entertainment out of the pay-per-view wrestling business. Ted Turner himself was livid, as were Petrik and Steve Chamberlain. So, T.H.E. announced plans for *WRESTLE WAR I: THE ULTIMATE GAMBLE*. The subtitle was no joke. *WWI* would be offered to cable systems as a head-to-head, same-hour challenge to the vaunted *WRESTLEMANIA*.

What was even more stunning is Turner had the support and pledge of 65 per cent of the cable operators to carry his show over McMahon's. Reason? McMahon had further demanded a 10 per cent increase in revenue splits for *WRESTLEMANIA*. The cable managers were not amused. The operators, themselves, asked T.H.E. if it could produce the show as a measure of protest against McMahon. Turner would have only five weeks to hype the show but agreed to do it. "What we have here is a situation where Vince says, 'It's okay for me to run a show against you but it's not okay for you to run a show against me,'" said Petrik. "There's a double standard here and Vince is about to see we're not kidding." I laughed when he told me the show's title.

Simultaneously, Turner laid out a \$4 million contract offer to WWF kingpin Hulk Hogan. Chamberlain told us the company was actively going after Roddy Piper, who first reached national stardom on TBS as sidekick to Gordon Solie in the early '80s.

But the challenge to *WRESTLEMANIA* died in four days. McMahon, realizing the cable operators were serious, and facing only four million homes to Turner's seven million, considered selling his prized show to NBC or HBO. But the revenues would be severely less than pay-per-view, so the Titan guru backed down from his money demands and the cable operators would ask Turner to back off the head-on challenge. *WRESTLE WAR I* would still be added as a fifth pay-per-view for 1989 for Turner but delayed until May. And TBS would insert an extra live *CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS* from New Orleans to go opposite *WRESTLEMANIA*.

The Saturday before the *CLASH/WRESTLEMANIA* showdown, I watched *WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING* and was incredulous. Not one mention was made of the TBS special (which would run three-and-a-half hours), save one 15-second spot showing Flair and Steamboat face-to-face and a throwaway mention by Ross in the final two minutes of the show. I knew Ross couldn't have made that decision but I found it incomprehensible that anyone would not heavily promote a major show of this ilk one week before its airing. The average casual fan did not even know a *CLASH* was coming.

Meltzer and I talked that evening and Dave couldn't believe it. My pal, Dick Bourne, called from Alexander City AL and was livid. It simply didn't make sense.

George Scott had produced a critically-successful *CHI-TOWN RUMBLE*, largely on the weight of a surprisingly-strong Luger-Barry Windham power match and the classic Steamboat victory over Flair for the NWA world title. The other five matches reflected Scott's slow, plodding, resthold-style pacing. Plus, Scott used virtually all of his gimmick finishes on the same night. But Scott's TV and arena efforts since were painful to watch. And some of the names he was considering bringing in were puzzling, mostly of the washed-up variety. Frankly, the direction looked perilous and Scott kept telling the brass, "It's going to take a long time to get things turned around." Maybe, but the momentum looked disastrous.

I picked up the phone on Tuesday morning and called Petrik. "Jack, did you see Saturday's show?" I asked. Petrik replied he hadn't. He had been in Los Angeles on business over the weekend and didn't return until Monday night. "Well, you better get a tape of it," I said. Then, I asked, "Did you or Jim (Herd) give a directive for Ross not to promote the *CLASH* on TBS?" I had since learned Scott had given Ross and Pedicino specific orders not to mention the special on television because he felt it would "hurt house attendance." Jack sounded perplexed. "Of course not," he said. "You mean they didn't talk about it? Why, on earth? This is a major venture for us and it's important for us to draw good ratings for that show." "Well, you need to watch the tape of Saturday and I suggest you watch it with Jim," I said. "It's embarrassing." Jack asked, "Do you know who decided this?" I was astounded he was asking me. "Well," I said, "yes, but I can't tell you how I know. It was George." I still, to this day, cannot reveal how I knew. I was taking notes on the conversation, as I did on most I had with the Turner people. Petrik paused and then, calmly, shocked me. "George just isn't going to

cut it, is he?" I waited, but it was obvious he wanted an opinion. "I don't feel comfortable answering that question, Jack," I said. "I've only met George once and this is a man's livelihood you're talking about here. But all I can judge is what's going on on TV and in the arenas and it's a mess." "You don't believe he can turn it around, do you? I'm asking for an opinion." "No." "Yeah, I was afraid of that," said Petrik. "We've told him over and over, we want new guys, younger guys. We want soap opera. And he just keeps giving us this slow stuff and wants to bring in all of these old guys."

Twenty minutes later, I called Herd. "Jim, did you give the order for the announcers not to talk about the *CLASH* Saturday?" I asked. "H-l, no! Why, did we not do it? I was in St. Louis and I didn't see the show but I would have never given that order," Herd said. "I'll be sure and watch it by this afternoon." Mind you, this was a Tuesday, five days before the special in the Louisiana Superdome and two days before TBS' switch of *WCW* from the Techwood Drive studios to Atlanta's Center Stage Theatre.

At 4:30 that afternoon, I received a call just before leaving my office. "George Scott has been fired," the caller said. I again thought it was a joke. "No kidding. He was fired about an hour ago. We've been told Herd and Petrik were furious about Saturday's TV show. All I know is, George came out of the office and his face was red."

I truly felt uncomfortable. I have no doubts Scott would have been booted in short order, anyway, because not even Flair-Steamboat classics could save the promotion from George's 1960s-style programs. But had I been a catalyst to unwittingly expedite his demise? I've never asked Petrik and never will.

Immediately, the speculation flew again of Bill Watts as the leading candidate to succeed Scott and become the "savior" of the NWA. Petrik asked my advice on who good bookers would be. I quickly mentioned Watts but I could tell that was not an option. Len Denton was doing interesting things in Portland but Piper was actually producing the TV. I dropped the names Jim Ross, Jim Cornette and Jerry Lawler but I told Jack there would likely be a conflict between Lawler and Flair, unless Jerry didn't wrestle.

Instead, Herd opted for a "committee" approach with Ross as chairman. That sounded pretty good to me because I knew Jim would attempt to institute Watts-style television. The rest of the panel would include Eddie Gilbert, Kevin Sullivan, Ric Flair and consultant Jim Barnett.

Things were developing so rapidly, I changed my schedule to drive the hour-and-a-half to Atlanta for the debut taping at Center Stage on Thursday night. As part of the night, Pedicino would produce *COUNTDOWN TO CLASH*, a Friday night hour which would preview the Sunday special and include a debate between Flair and Steamboat over their two-out-of-three fall rematch and a live appearance by legendary ex-NWA champions Lou Thesz and Harley Race to analyze the title match. "I'll see the sun rise with this one," said Pedicino, who was known for his legendary all-night editing sessions of *PWTW*. In fact, after grabbing a late supper with Ross, Boni and Joe, I drove back to Auburn and Joe began a 20-hour editing job which saw the final product delivered to TBS just four hours prior to air.

That first taping was hot. Shane Douglas and Bob Orton Jr., who looked better than he had in his waning WWF days, were both recruited. The matches revived their pep. Sting defeated Mike Rotunda in the opener to win the TV title, his first major singles belt in the NWA, which signaled a change in philosophy in a hurry. Ross knew Sting was the future and started him on his run. As the taping ended, Ross said, "Well, it's a start. We still have to win some friends back but I think we got things back on the right track." *COUNTDOWN* went over well enough to serve as a pilot for the eventual Friday night *POWER HOUR*. Morale seemed up and no one chanted "bor-ring." Just before a Danger Zone in which he put Sting over hugely, Paul E. looked to the right, saw me in the stands and raised his Coke cup to me. He later told me, "I bet you went out to eat with Pedicino and had double-cheese on your pizza."

Pedicino immediately became a target for the NWA guys who suspected he was first cousin to a KGB agent. Herd laid down the law that anyone discovered leaking information to newsletter editors would be fired (though until the "suspension" of Paul E. Dangerously in October 1991, none were ever disciplined). The first serious test came when Barry Windham was fired by Herd.

Windham, who had lost the U.S. belt to Luger at *CHI-TOWN RUMBLE*, "injured" his wrist in the bout, purportedly to give him time off for surgery on a legitimately injured wrist. But Barry had not been able to be found for four weeks after the match to check on his progress. On a Monday night, I received a call past midnight: "You better check this out...I think Barry was fired today. He came in and the story is he made a play for the book. Herd blew up because Barry apparently hadn't had surgery and let him go. Check it out." Before leaving for work the next morning, I called Herd and confronted him with my information. It was true. "But how did you know about this?" he asked. "News travels fast...you're going to find that out."

That night, I was headed for Atlanta for another Center Stage taping. But after my call, the NWA brain trust huddled. Who could have leaked that stuff about Barry to Beverly? Immediately, the suspect was Joe. Or at least there were those who wanted it to be. They would mutter that Joe was a direct pipeline to Dave Meltzer and me (I can verify for a fact that Joe talked to Dave Meltzer twice in the first six months he worked for Turner—once, when Dave called to congratulate him on the premiere *POWER HOUR*, and once at a Nashville hotel right before *WRESTLE WAR*. And that conversation was in full view of Jim Ross, Dennis Brent, Terry Taylor, Michael Hayes and a score of hardcore fans. Joe was summoned to the meeting. "Hey, guys. I was editing at Threshold (an Atlanta production house) until 2:00 this morning. I didn't even know Barry was fired until I got home," Joe said. "Boni told me Missy had called to tell her. I haven't even talked to Steve since Saturday." Joe was telling the absolute truth. Some on the "committee" weren't convinced. But Joe had told me that Saturday night he had a long editing session and would be out of pocket well into Tuesday morning. "Look, fellows," Joe told them. "We can solve this real fast. Let's get a polygraph in here and let's all take a lie-detector test to see who's been leaking information. I'll be the first one to take it. I wonder how many of you would be willing to join me." Joe wasn't bluffing. He would have taken it and passed it. If that bunch had spent as much time trying to refine its creative product, rather than trying to nail Joe, the shows would have raced past Vince McMahon's faster than Bonnie Blair on a speedskating track.

That night in Atlanta, I was sitting with Boni and Joe found me. "Who told you about Barry Windham?" he asked. "I can't tell you that," I told him. "You know better than to ask me." Said Joe: "Well, I've had one fine day since you called Herd and some of them still don't believe it wasn't me." The next day, Herd called to tell me: "Look, I want you to be careful about this leaks. The fact is, I like your friend and I don't want him to get in trouble with the rest of the group." I told Jim I understood but I wasn't going to ignore information which came from other sources and that's where it all was going to come from because Joe and I had an agreement I would never confront new information which came from our conversations. Plus, Joe honestly didn't know about Barry. What one learns in any kind of journalism, be it the underground tabloids of pro wrestling or mainstream broadcast or print reporting, sources of confidential information have to be kept confidential and betraying a trust is a sacrilege.

The fellowship which comes from the gang of 50 which traveled to many of the 1988-91 era NWA/WCW pay-per-view shows was incomparable. Yeah, a few get a bit too carried away with being "insiders," but for the most part, one finds a great bond with the other fellows (few or no women are ever part of the "pack"). Two stand out, in particular to me---the Nashville weekend in 1989 and Greensboro in February 1990.

In Nashville, most of us gathered on Saturday at Hickory Hollow Mall for an amazing display of affection for the NWA. Dick Bourne and I had ridden up from Alabama. Meltzer, Dave Flaherty, Jeff Bowdren, Mike Gunter, Dennis Brent, Scott Hudson—lots of guys whose names are familiar to newsletter readers---were along. More than 6,000 people paraded through the long line in the mall center to get autographs and pictures from the NWA stars. I met Lance Russell and Bob Caudle for the first time and was like a (as Black Bart would say) dad-gum kid.

Joe was emceeing the mall show and it astounded me how some wrestlers would behave. Most, particularly Rick Steiner, were getting a big kick out of seeing the kids. The Road Warriors were having pictures made with handicapped children. It was a warm exchange. But when Joe asked Lex Luger to come front and center to talk to the fans, Lex asked the incongruous, "What's my motivation? What am I supposed to say?" Here's a guy who had been doing interviews on television for three years and he didn't know what to say? Joe finally told him, "Look, I don't care what you say but you're the top singles babyface in this company and these people expect to hear something from you." Luger did it, griping all the way. Believe me, it was not a memorable interview.

That night, back at the Hyatt-Regency, where the wrestlers were staying, court was being held in the lounge until well past 2 a.m. Ross was swapping jokes with everybody but the "prairie dogs," as I often called the insider pack, was virtually nudging Jim into an impromptu news conference. Ross, now as chief booker, was in a position of creative power and the hardcores couldn't pump him for enough information. Brent, who was in Nashville also to interview with Herd for the job as editor of the NWA magazine, made a comment which was popular with the insiders but not with the NWA traditionals: "Tomorrow, the UWF is reborn." Michael Hayes, who was enjoying about the third glass of whatever drink he was having, said: "Yeah, Dennis. Sunday afternoon, the NWA is de-Crockettized." That got a laugh from the pack. Hayes was defeating Luger the next day for the U.S. belt, with help from returning Freebird Terry Gordy.

The next afternoon at the Nashville auditorium, the sight was stunning. A huge buffet had been spread for the wrestlers, many of whom had brought their families for the Sunday show. Rick Steiner was pushing Animal's son down the corridor on a skateboard and grinning with every push. I met Lou Thesz for the first time and was again like a kid. To this day, I still believe---judged in the respective eras men have competed---Thesz is the greatest ever in the game and I was lucky enough to see him regularly before he went into retirement. Eddie Gilbert's mother, Peggy, had ridden over from Lexington and I was introduced to Beth Flair and Bonnie Steamboat. As they used to say in south Georgia, this was as close to a love-feast as you would find, a personality much like dinner-on-the-ground homecomings at southern churches.

I had brought along my portable word processor to type my MATWATCH report on *WRESTLE WAR*, as the show was in progress. Bowdren said I reminded him of one of those guys in the forties who had a broad-brimmed hat full of press cards. Joe and Lance set me up a position next to their broadcast slot for the 900 number. I caught myself becoming the target of several dagger stares from David Crockett but just went about my business.

Flair won the NWA belt back from Steamboat that day and Terry Funk returned for his magnificently-performed attack on the NWA champion. Two things I remember vividly about that nine-minute masterpiece, Thesz and the late Pat O'Connor, who---along with Funk---had been "judges" for the title match, went back to the rear to watch on the monitor and both were stunned when they saw Terry going after Ric. They had not been clued into the post-match angle. When Terry finally left to the crescendo of boos, he stopped at Pedicino's desk and bopped him on the head twice, yelling, "You still think I'm too old? You still think I'm too old?" Joe asked Terry later if he was going to do that on a regular basis. "It gets heat, don't it?" Terry sheepishly grinned.

After the show, which had the hardcores as sky-high as I've ever seen, the first crack in the core of the booking "committee" came. As it developed, a security officer had inadvertently asked Peggy Gilbert to leave the backstage area. For whatever reason, she was given the incorrect credentials. Missy Hyatt Gilbert came screaming out of the back, much as you see her character when she says, "I'm gonna go tell somebody." A couple of minutes later, Eddie came flying out of the dressing room. Ross, Bob Caudle, Meltzer, Brent and I were huddled up for a post-game review of the show. Eddie dashed over to security chief Doug Dellinger. All we could see at a distance was Eddie bobbing up and down in Dellinger's nose much as Billy Martin did with major league umpires (Eddie laughs about this today). He was hot. He then followed Dellinger all the way down to where we were, then abruptly looked at Ross and yelled, "AND JIM ROSS--- YOU BETTER WIPE THAT SMIRK OFF YOUR FACE. YOU'RE NOT AS BIG A MAN AS YOU THINK YOU ARE, EITHER!" Jim wasn't smirking but Ross immediately hauled Gilbert into an office to calm him down. The next morning, Jim phoned Tommy Gilbert, Eddie's father, to apologize for the mix-up with Peggy. But a perfectly wonderful day had ended on a down note and Brent said, "I was afraid something like this might happen with all of those guys on that committee." Caudle made perhaps the ultimate comment on Eddie's outburst: "I don't know what it was all about but you can probably bet it has something to do with Missy."

Ten months later, after several changes in bookers, talent and creative direction, the prairie dogs assembled in Greensboro for the second *WRESTLE WAR*. My brother-in-law, Randy Geeslin, was hosting me for the weekend. The wrestlers were housed in a huge Holiday Inn near the Greensboro Coliseum. Court started on Saturday night. Chris Cruise, who had been a *MATWATCH*er for more than a year and was settling into what we thought was a comfortable nest as host of *WORLD WIDE WRESTLING*, immediately met me. Many of the wrestlers and their wives were eating supper and Ross came out, comfortable in a sport shirt. Lance dropped by to say hello. Dennis Brent asked, "Where's Gordon (Solie)?" Remembering one of Gordon's memorable lines from the Flair-Funk "I Quit" match, I blurted out, "He's probably at a bar somewhere going, 'Five letters...two words...I QUIT!'" Ross almost collapsed from laughter.

I met Funk for the first time. Terry had been our 1989 *MATWATCH* Man of the Year. Cruise had given Terry his copy of the yearbook on the plane to Greensboro and both Terry and his wife, Vicki, came over to talk. Chris had said, "Terry really is his own guy and he doesn't care what's written about him or said about him. But he was honestly touched by your selection." Terry and I evolved into an hour-long conversation about the direction of the NWA and, clearly, Terry was troubled. As so-called executive producer of the Turner syndicated shows, he was having a difficult time getting in the sizzle to the shows he felt was necessary to draw younger viewers. Funk studied rating books and he had done a market-by-market analysis and found the deficiencies behind the WWF in most markets was the solid lack of children and teens watching the NWA.

Terry had ideas for four characters he felt would make a difference. "I even sketched them out, in costume and developed the ideas for how their programs would develop," said Funk. "But a lot of these guys don't want to listen to that. You can't do wrestling the way it was done in the 1970s and even the '80s but we spend too much time talking about 'the way we used to do things.'"

Funk was not silent in feeling it was time for Flair to change his character. "What you have here is probably one of the greatest showmen in the history of the business," said Funk. "But he's getting too old to keep being the Nature Boy. He needs to move away from that and become the Living Legend." I learned of the sincerity of Terry Funk that night. He wasn't much for politics. He simply said what he felt and that was not always the popular thing. He saw Flair was burning himself out as booker and needed to be removed. But it also weakened Terry within the makeup of the creative committee.

The Greensboro weekend saw the wrestlers probably as open with hotel visitors and hardcores as you will ever see. MATWATCHer Dan Reilly was amazed. "Are they always this way with the fans?" asked Dan. "I couldn't believe how they were interacting with everyone." Hawk showed up with Mike Enos in tow, who would supplant the fired Danny Spivey as Mark Callaway's tag partner against the Road Warriors the next night. Cruise was exceptionally popular with the prairie dogs---only they felt he was being too loose with inside information. Ron Lemieux said, "Cruise is a fantastic guy but he's not going to last with these people. He's telling too much stuff."

The paths of Cruise and Funk would intertwine in more ways than one. An increasingly popular broadcast team, pairing the earnestness of Cruise with the wry humor of Funk, the path would end for each little more than six weeks later. Chris, worn out and flu-stricken from more than 17 days on the road as a ring announcer, was to join Funk for a taping in Greenwood MS. But when the plane arrived in Jackson MS, Funk simply decided he had had enough and booked a flight home to Texas. When Cruise arrived in Greenwood (where the returning Tony Schiavone would be along in his first week as new syndication executive producer), he learned Kevin Sullivan would be assigned as his co-host. That was it for Chris.

Sullivan had a reputation for being less than tactful and was not a fan of Cruise. The final straw came when, in a production meeting the afternoon of the taping, Kevin reportedly said to Cruise, "Be sure and tell this to Meltzer when you talk to him," in reference to an angle planned for the night. Cruise was furious and refused to go on. "I knew it was unprofessional and I knew it was going to get me in trouble," Chris told me the next week. "But I knew if I went out there, Kevin was going to do everything in his power to embarrass me. He didn't like me and he didn't hide it." It would be the end of Cruise with WCW. On the way back to the hotel, Cruise was riding with Solie, who asked him, "You wouldn't have done this if you hadn't been so burned out, would you?" Cruise told Gordon yes but I still don't believe he would have gone out with Sullivan. And I don't believe Kevin wouldn't have tried to embarrass him.

About a half-hour before the crowd was let into the Greensboro Coliseum, Jim Herd called me into the arena. He had earlier asked to meet with me. "Lance Russell has come to me with an idea. I'll be honest with you, it's against my better judgment," Herd said, repeating a phrase commonplace in his business dealings (he once told the *Midnight Express* and Jim Cornette on a contract renewal, "You know, I was really against this."): "But Lance thinks a night on the 900 number of wrestling news that isn't like all the hype we put on would make some money. So, if you're game, we'd like you to do it." I expressed to Herd honest reservations. I would not give up the editorial independence in my newsletter. If I felt WCW should be criticized, I was going to do so. Further, I would not be muzzled as to what to say. I would not go on *The Wrestling Hotline* and simply shill for WCW. Otherwise, no deal. Yes, it would be a compromise, I knew. But as a broadcaster, I was curious if this would work and I knew I could develop a program to attract callers. Plus, there is no greater booster of young people than Lance. I was honored he thought enough of my talents to propose me.

Thus, was born 900 MATWATCH. However, it is amazing that as of this writing, more than two years later, it is still going. Other than *The Ross Report*, it is the longest-running segment on the line, yet it remains a mystery. For one thing, unless you're a newsletter subscriber, you don't know who Steve Beverly is. Second, while my Tuesday segment is mentioned in promos, it hardly gets a significant push. I'm not complaining, mind you. It's their company. They can treat it as they wish. But I often feel many WCW people see 900 MATWATCH as an evil they wish would go away. Other than in its debut week, it has never been mentioned by a WCW announcer. Turner Home Entertainment asks us to plug the next night's event at the end of our segs. I do. But I'm yet to hear Schiavone plug me on his Monday night event. Makes you wonder.

Chapter Four

The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

As much as I admire the spunk and innovation of Vince McMahon and detest the moral fiber of his organization, I still believe a masterstroke on his part came with the financing of the movie *NO HOLDS BARRED*, the Hulk Hogan bomb. At a time when Ted Turner's boys were on a clear upswing with three straight solid pay-per-view shows, abetted by the long-awaited Ric Flair babyface turn, McMahon stole the spotlight with the constant barrage of publicity, pre-arranged appearances, talk show spots and newspaper reviews.

It didn't matter how bad the movie was---and it was. Keeping the focus on the national scene away from the NWA, which was still being reorganized under Jim Herd, was the essential. While the hardcores, in far smaller percentages in the fan universe, were marveling to Flair vs. Funk and Luger vs. Steamboat in the second *GREAT AMERICAN BASH* pay-per-view, kids across America were far more lured to Hogan and his flick nemesis, Zeus. Again, McMahon didn't lure customers with wrestling. He used marketing skills, which TBS---still in the midst of a terrible merchandising contract---was yet to launch.

The Flair turn should have been the biggest thing in pro wrestling, short of a Hogan-Flair match (which is anything but today). But it didn't work, for several reasons. Many related to TBS' inexperience with wrestling and some to Ric himself. Steve Chamberlain had told me shortly after TBS bought the NWA the company was developing a "Best of Ric Flair" videotape and a Ric Flair book. I didn't see how either could miss but neither ever materialized. When Jack Petrik made the decision to keep Flair out of the ring for eleven weeks after the Terry Funk attack in Nashville, the company should have been readying a huge marketing and merchandising blitz to capitalize on Flair's new fan favorite status. The book and tape should have been available through Turner's 800 number. Some TBS insiders, however, say Ric shares in the problem. "Flair is a very private person," said one who is still with the company. "He's not one to open up very much and I don't think he would have cooperated with a book."

Indeed, Flair had balked at the original buildup plan for his run with Steamboat. You may remember two sports-oriented profiles of Steamboat in training. TBS wanted to do the same with Flair but he insisted on doing some tired bits of him getting out of a limousine flanked by a row of women. "Ric doesn't like his workouts photographed," said the source. "He's that private."

The failure of that turn, in my view, ultimately stemmed from two problems. One, it was done while houses were still way down in attendance in order to "quick fix" them back to bigger gates. Likely, TBS should have waited to turn Flair until the end of the year, while it had hopefully worked the kinks out of learning the wrestling business (though Herd's ultimate track record would make that end arguable). Two, Ric never changed his character. When he turned in the Carolinas in the early 1980s, he would give disciplined, sincere, calculated interviews and only turn up the volume when the heat of a feud was at its peak. The interview he gave Ross at his Charlotte home while in the neck brace during the *GUTS AND GLORY* special was of that ilk. Had he moved the Ric Flair character in that direction, the babyface in Flair would have been illuminated. But in every interview after he came back, he was the same old Flair, spouting the same tired clichés. The only things different were his opponents and tag partners. He simply wasn't commercial.

By October 1989, TBS completed an audience research analysis on its wrestling, including its characterizations. And a discovery was made which startled many hardcores and NWA regulars: Flair drew a strong negative rating with viewers and the research was taken three months after the babyface turn. "A lot of people were shocked," said Pedicino, who was in on a number of the research meetings. "They got the numbers back and in response after response, people—particularly adult males, the strong part of the wrestling viewership responded, 'I just don't like Ric Flair.' There were some people in the TBS research department who wanted to get the belt off of Flair at the Center Stage the night the research came back."

Jim Cornette was one who was skeptical of the research. "Wrestling is not something you can just go out and do computer printouts on and come up with the perfect star or the perfect angle," Cornette once told me. "How many of those people who answered those questionnaires were wrestling fans to start with, or would have watched wrestling with or without Ric Flair? That's something TBS and Herd never understood."

The research did confirm what many younger fans were verifying. Sting drew the highest "Q" score, or popularity rating in the promotion. By Christmas, Turner would be forgetting all about Flair as a fan hero and preparing Steve Borden for the biggest push of his young career.

Eddie Gilbert related to me his perspective of the events which led to Flair becoming head booker for the NWA after the Baltimore Bash in 1989. "We (the committee) had all felt good about the show. We'd had a lot of hot matches and the brawl Flair and Sting had with Funk and Muta in the last ten minutes of the show was strictly an impromptu thing because the main event ended early," Gilbert told me. "But not one person came up to me or any of the rest of the committee and thanked us or congratulated us for the show. Heck, it was the last true sellout they ever had in a building that big. But the next day, Herd and Barnett were griping about the show and all they were doing were pointing out negative things."

It was when Herd turned his criticisms to Flair that a tremor started. "You know how Herd is. Sometimes he'd make a comment and you didn't know whether he was joking or cutting you down," said Eddie. "He told Flair, 'You know, you'd think somebody who had 15 years in the business would know not to brawl outside the TV lights.' Flair just blew up. He told him he'd had it with all the crap and he was just going to leave right then and there and go to work for Vince McMahon. He was giving his notice. Of course, then two days later, Flair went to lunch with Herd and called his bluff and made him the booker. I knew that was the end of the committee and the beginning of the end for me. I was one of the old UWF guys and Flair never could get that out of his mind. Gilbert never regained main event status under the Flair regime."

Since our first meeting in December 1989, shortly after he was named the first MATWATCH Man of the Year, I have truly enjoyed a friendship with Eddie Gilbert. He has a genuine sense of humor and is as much a student of wrestling as you will ever see. He rivals Paul E. Dangerously as to who can develop the best impersonations of other wrestling personalities. And I've never let him live down carrying that ridiculous Burger King crown to the ring before the 1989 Bash battle royal.

The night I first met Eddie, in back of the Columbus auditorium, his then-wife Missy didn't like me (and still doesn't). Missy was offended by a line in my profile of Eddie in our first MATWATCH annual. It read, "He has a gorgeous wife who wants to be a star." Anyone who knew Missy knew it was true but she felt I was being uncomplimentary. For a while, she professed to friends she didn't want Eddie to subscribe to MATWATCH because, "I don't like him," referring to me. Oh, well.

Since moving within 30 miles of Eddie's home in Lexington TN, I've learned much about the personality of people who are from this part of the country. They're a more open, friendly—yet, more temperamental and plain-spoken people. I can see the Eddie Gilbert I saw backstage in Nashville during the security mixup with his mother in many west Tennesseans. They can be volatile. Yet, there is a warmth and "home folks" personality which is part of the complexity of Gilbert.

I had been in Jackson only seven weeks when Eddie called and asked to meet me for lunch across the street from the hospital where his mother works. He had his friend, John L. Gilliam with him. Eddie had a lot of things going on in his life and I could tell he just wanted to talk. He had made up his mind to leave WCW, as the company was now being billed. Gilbert was complaining of a recurrence of his old shoulder injuries and was sitting out some shows. But a TBS doctor could not find the problem, at least to hear Herd tell it. "I'm thinking of telling Jim Herd I just won't take another penny on my contract (which still had several months to run)," said Gilbert. "How do you think he'll react to that?" I told him Herd fluctuated but I predicted Herd would be totally surprised by his proposal and would probably try to get him to reconsider. That is exactly what happened. "But I don't want to take any more money if I can't work. I've talked to my daddy about it and he says it's the right thing to do."

Of course, Eddie was back in the ring in four weeks in Memphis. And I heard from assorted readers who felt Eddie "used the sheets" in order to get out of his deal with WCW. If you want to get technical about it, that may be true. However, the media is "used" every day—by politicians, by interest groups, by p.r. specialists angling for a spotlight. Only Eddie knows the degree his shoulder was injured at the time. But at least he didn't simply sit on his can and take that TBS guaranteed money as several other contract performers allegedly have done over the last three years.

But Gilbert was also calm about his impending divorce from Missy Hyatt. In fact, I sensed a feeling of relief on his part that the marriage was over. "You just can't have two people trying to combine the same kind of career in this business," he told me. "We really tried to make it work. But she has her goals and I'm going in a different direction, so we just decided to go our separate ways."

Five weeks later, he picked me up on Saturday morning and Eddie, Sam Lowe, Gilliam and I headed the 80 miles down I-40 to Channel 5 in Memphis for the USWA show. The broadcast was secondary to the stories Eddie regaled me with on the trip to and from Memphis. We talked about his days as UWF booker in the twilight of Bill Watts' ownership and the months after Jim Crockett's buyout of Watts. "We had been told how great this was going to be when Crockett bought us. We were going to continue as two separate groups and have some crossovers but they told us and they had told Bill Watts they were going to have a "Super Bowl of Wrestling" between the NWA and the UWF the week before the actual Super Bowl," said Gilbert. That was the same scenario I had been told. I was in Joe Pedicino's office in Atlanta the day the Crockett purchase of the UWF was announced. Ross had called Joe to tell him the details and the Super Bowl was one of the first things which came up as cementing the deal.

"Bill Watts knew three weeks after he sold the company what they (Crockett Promotions and Dusty Rhodes) were doing," Gilbert said. "The first indication was when the One-Man Gang told Dusty he had signed a contract with Vince McMahon. We all figured he'd either go with Steve Williams or Ted DiBiase as the UWF champion. In fact, Crockett offered DiBiase \$250,000 to stay with him. But instead, Dusty brought in Bubba Rogers (Ray Traylor, the WWF's Big Bossman), who hadn't even been wrestling and made him the champion in one night. We knew we were the B-team then."

Eddie told me about how he was forced to ax some competitors once it became apparent Crockett didn't have the money to support the talent from both organizations. "Dusty called me in and told me we were going to have to get rid of eight guys," Eddie said, relating the story in a precise Rhodes impersonation. "Eddie, it's all binness. I'm gonna let you be the one to tell these fellows, 'cause you need the 'sperience. I've had to do it all my life. I've had to give the ax to fellows whose wives were expecting babies right at Christmas time but it had to be done because it was binness. You need the 'sperience, Eddie.' So, here I was, having to go tell eight guys I brought in who I didn't have any heat with that they were out of a job. Dusty didn't want to do it. A couple of those guys still haven't forgiven me for that. I got some 'sperience, all right."

Gilbert's now-celebrated "Battle of New Orleans" brawl in the Louisiana Superdome, involving himself and Terry Taylor against Sting and Chris Adams also brought back bad memories. "More people talked about that and the crowd went crazier over that than anything we had done for a long time," Eddie remembered. "But not one person from the NWA came up and said, 'Nice job,' or anything like it. Instead, Dusty just said, 'Okay, Eddie, what are you gonna do for your next one?'"

After plopping the UWF belt on Steve Williams in Oklahoma City during the summer Bash tour in 1987, it became evident the former Watts group was in its twilight. "We knew the handwriting was on the wall when he was booking Steve Williams defending the UWF title in the second match on a bunch of cards," Eddie said. "He'd put me in the opening match. But there wasn't anything we could do. It got real bad between the NWA and the UWF guys." Eddie remembers doing a TBS interview with Terry Taylor in October, in which he shouted the virtues of the UWF, which drew an angry unplanned on-air rebuttal from Flair, who kept referring to "you UWF guys." "It's funny," said Eddie. "Flair's like that. One minute, he'll blow up. Then, he may come up to you later and say, 'You and I go back a long way, brother.'"

In the last two years, I've emceed the children's beauty pageant Eddie's mother, Peggy, annually coordinates at the Henderson County Fair and if I'm still here, I'll do it again next year, if she asks. She is a genuinely kindhearted lady, takes an active role in politics in her community and is known by everybody, not for what her husband and sons have done for a living, but for her own personality. I truly enjoy the company of the Gilbert family and the opportunity to spend time with Eddie does not come often enough. But I am truly pulling for his new marriage to Debra Ann Miceli to work. I do not know Madusa but I hope she and Eddie have a good life together. I wish I had the same wishes for his former wife.

For four years, I have genuinely tried to like Missy Hyatt. I try to like every human being. I came close to a civil relationship with Missy at one point in 1990. In January of that year, Missy mailed me a handwritten letter, stating she didn't understand why I didn't like her and why I had written such mean things about her. She then went into a detailed explanation about how when she married Eddie, she married "a real man I could look up to." Fine. I had never questioned that. I'd had no reason to do so.

Missy was convinced I had a vendetta against her. Largely because I wrote honest opinions in MATWATCH that her character was an insult to women and set the cause of equality back 20 years. And despite futile efforts to portray her as a "broadcast journalist," perish the thought, I still think that.

Last year, when I did a two-part column in MATWATCH, "The Women's View," the response was interesting. Virtually two-thirds of the female subscribers to our bulletin wrote or called to express appreciation for standing up for their dignity. And if the male-dominated, old-world wrestling industry would read from this page, they might pick up an increasing number of women viewers if they started treating their female performers with 1990s-era respect. Yet, assorted males with overextended hormones wrote to comment paraphrased forms of, "Oh, that's just wrestling" (the most cliché-ridden excuse in fandom), or actually attempting to defend the entertainment value of the brainless bimbo characterizations or men-hitting-women angles.

Finally, at a February 1990 card in Columbus (when Eddie did a 20-minute Broadway with Cactus Jack), Missy approached me in a friendly fashion. A mutual friend had tried to tell her I wasn't her enemy. Eddie had tried to tell her. But she was particularly amused when I inserted her into the 1990 annual Wrestling Broadcasting System listing for *ALL MY CHILDREN* as becoming a rival in Pine Valley to Erica Kane. It turns out Susan Lucci is one of Missy's favorites and I guess she saw I wasn't such a vicious animal, after all. She and Eddie and I had a pleasant half-hour talk in a vacant room, including swapping Jim Herd impersonations.

I was never one to ring Missy's telephone for information, as others do often. She's fair game as a source, if you want to do that kind of thing. Perhaps she felt I did not consider her a valid enough source and that may have had something to do with her antagonism at me. But I suspect a large part of it is I simply have never fawned all over her as have assorted hardcores.

Fact is, Melissa Hyatt has allowed herself to be used as little more than a sex object by male wrestling executives who predominantly care about her "t-and-a" appeal to male libidos. And she, unfortunately, has gone right along with it. She has made respectable money doing it and will for the next two years. She has not done much for the buy-rates or Sunday afternoon ratings on TBS. If she has a genuine positive value, it is in her numbers for The Wrestling Hotline. Her "Missy Does Mail" segment makes a sizeable profit for the 900 number, abetted by strong on-air promotion on Sundays.

The woman genuinely wants an acting career and she is attempting to pursue that avenue in her new home in California. I wish her well toward that end. However, her current inamorata was the source of an amusing telephone exchange nearly a year ago.

Unless memory fails me, I have probably watched *THE WONDER YEARS* twice. Nothing against the show. It's just not a comedy which has struck a chord with me. When Jason Hervey appeared as a special guest on the first *CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS*, I didn't even know who he was. Ken Osmond as Eddie Haskell was a far bigger celebrity to me.

If I have something in common with Hervey, I suppose it's that we're both wrestling fans. That may be about all. I'll never forget how he was nearly booed out of the place at the Philadelphia Civic Center during the first *HALLOWEEN HAVOC* when he was used as a ring announcer during a match. Then and there, Jeff Carr decided after three shots, that was the last time he wanted him on any TBS wrestling program. "Jason calls often. He always wants to be on," Carr told me. "But I think we've seen him enough." Most hardcore fans agreed.

I'll be quite honest. When I first heard Missy and Jason were an item, I laughed. And I wasn't the only one who did. You should have heard Jim Herd. Between guffaws, he said, "Oh, everybody knows that thing's going nowhere." Of course, Jim's public relations chief, Barry Norman, had been confirming reports from E! The Entertainment Channel and WXIA-TV, among several sources, that the Hervey-Hyatt pair was engaged. It had been an item on Atlanta Channel 11's *NOONDAY* entertainment news. Both Atlanta newspapers had reported it. And a 24-hour cable network featured the story. But when I quoted all of those sources, Missy vented her anger at me.

My telephone answering machine had been on the fritz (more on that device later). So, I had temporarily replaced it with an old one which would only allow a one-minute message. I returned from some work at my TV station on a Saturday afternoon. On the line were three blinks. One was a message from Missy and two were from Jason.

The following is a transcript of Missy's message. It was so rich, I saved the tape:

"I just read what you wrote about me and Jason and MATWATCH and I just want to tell you, it's not true. You've always been against me. You've never liked me and I don't like you, either. You may think this is all real funny but I don't. And I'll tell you what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna go in Monday morning and tell Mr. Herd I think he needs to get you off the hotline...and I'm gonna get you fired. And if you think that's not enough, just wait until Jason gets a hold of you. He's mad about this, too...and he can take care of you. I'm tired of you...just wait till I talk to Mr. Herd. I'll...."

I don't know what else Missy was going to do. The message ran out and she never called back. Nor did she leave a number for me to offer a rebuttal. Not that I would have. I had better things to do with my time. All I know is she told a mutual friend of much the same intention concerning me. I related the story to Herd and he just laughed. He didn't laugh often. But when he did, it was a belly-laugh.

The next message was from Jason. As was the third. Yes, I saved that tape, too, just for an occasion such as this. Here is what the TV brother of Fred Savage had to say:

"HMMMMM, an interesting, maybe even a clever message. You know, you sound like such a nice guy. It's hard to believe you would do what you've done. But let me tell you something. You have no right to write anything about me in your little publication....I mean, ever. Look, Missy and I are simply boyfriend and girlfriend. That's all. Nothing more. And it's nobody else's business. People in Hollywood don't take very well to people like you poking their nose into their business. I happen to be an actor. I'm not a wrestler. I'm not one of these steroid freaks. So, don't you ever...ever (end of message)."

"To finish what I was saying, don't you ever...ever write another thing about me again in your newsletter, what is you call it, MATWATCH? And by the way, what is that TV station you work for in Jackson...WBBJ? You know, I work for ABC and Bob Iger (president of ABC Entertainment) and Brandon Stoddard (president of ABC Motion Pictures) are both very good friends of mine. And I'd hate for them to call up your station and your manager and have them say they think he ought to get rid of his news director. I'd hate that for your family. But you keep it up, and I'm warning you: it could happen (end of message)."

Obviously, Jason couldn't think of any more entertainment figures with whom to threaten me. So, he didn't call back a third time. Yes, WBBJ is an ABC affiliate but it's been more than a year and I haven't had that call from Brandon or Bob and neither has my general manager, Tommy Spain. Some people at WBBJ who work with me got a good laugh out of the tape when they heard it, however.

I wonder how many pro wrestlers would get an equal charge out of being labeled "steroid freaks." Some are but they jealously defend themselves against that trademark. I've had people tell me Hervey has expressed interest in wrestling under a mask for a nationally-televised organization as The Wonder Boy. But, so far, there hasn't been a line of traffic to sign him up.

Jason Hervey has probably made more money in the last five years than I have in a lifetime. And I wish him well in his future acting career and with his intended, if that is what she is. They deserve each other. I must have struck a nerve to draw a telephone threat from a 19-year-old TV series regular. I'm flattered.

That infernal answering machine has been the source of the ugly side of pro wrestling in the last three years. Any serious newsletter editor with more than 200 subscribers and any degree of contacts has to have a phone recorder. But either a demented subscriber or a sick wrestler (or wrestling company employee) created a genuine scare in my household for several months in 1990.

It all started the morning after of the *ROYAL RUMBLE* in Orlando. The timing may have been totally coincidental. But at 2 a.m., Rebecca and I were suddenly awakened to what sounded like a series of unerased answering machine messages. Some were three days old. I felt that strange sensation as if I had been dreaming. It didn't dawn on me what was happening.

Finally, the messages stopped. Still groggy, I went back to bed. Two minutes later, they started again. I went back into my home office and picked up the phone. Quickly, I heard a click and dial tone. Maybe that would be enough to stop it. But no, two more times, the mad message-tapper struck again. My only option to get a decent night's sleep was to unplug the machine.

Off and on over the next three weeks, I would catch the tampering. I called Joe Pedicino to get his thoughts. He offered a few possibilities. Joe was only days away from leaving WCW but he believed with as many people as were on his trail to try to tag him as a newsletter leak, my phantom infiltrator could be someone within the company trying to nail someone for talking to me. I told Dave Meltzer and Dick Bourne and they agreed but Dave suggested it could also be a nutty subscriber having some sick fun.

It ceased for about a month, then it resurfaced. Mostly, it occurred at night but who knows how many times it happened while I was at work during the day. Every answering machine has a digital code and if someone can mathematically break that code, he can listen to your messages. Unfortunately, my original machine had a two-digit code---the easiest to break. I talked to Jim Cornette about it and he, ironically, told me of some suspicious happenings with his machine.

When we moved into our home in Jackson, the tampering resumed, only this time a step further. Rebecca heard the machine go off several times while she was home during the day and heard what sounded like someone hitting two phone digits. I knew the phantom was at it again. I filed a complaint with South Central Bell. Further, I was told by five different people of suspicions of a specific person within WCW who could be the guilty party. I will not name him because I could never prove it. But I faxed a letter to Jack Petrik to tell him I had reason to believe someone in WCW could be responsible and if I could ever determine the party, I would press charges. Jim Herd called and asked me who had been pinned as a possible suspect. I didn't want to tell him. But he insisted, so I did, with the understanding I didn't want any confrontation unless I could prove it. "Why would *he* want to do that?" Herd asked. "Why would anybody want to do it?" I responded. But I told Jim if the company was that desperate to track down my sources, why didn't they just have my phone tapped?

I caught the tampering three consecutive times on a Friday morning, two days after the *COASTAL CRUSH CLASH*. Each time, I picked up and made a sarcastic remark to the party, who always hung up. Then, the person went further. Joe called me the next night while I was watching *MONOPOLY* on ABC. "What in the world is that message?" Joe asked. I thought he was referring to one of my many TV or commercial jingles. When I didn't respond in an appropriate fashion, Joe said: "You obviously haven't heard your machine. Play it." I did. The phantom had now broken the code to my outgoing message. He had changed it in a voice not unlike Ole Anderson's Black Scorpion tones (it definitely wasn't Ole): "Beverly....change your message. Change your message, Beverly. If you know what's good for you, you'll change your message. Change it, Beverly. Change your message. Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!" Now, I was plenty angry. I knew my only option was to buy a more sophisticated, near tamper-proof machine. I did that night. The tampering ended because the phantom isn't a mathematical genius. But if you think it's all fun and games publishing a mat newsletter, remember this tale.

Jim Cornette is a true original. And in the last year, he has probably taken more grief from people because of moves he hasn't made, than the many wonderful things he has done within the mat industry. Frankly, I think he would have a bright future on cable's Comedy Channel, if someone would offer him the co-host spot on *MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATRE 3000*.

Cornette happens to be an old TV buff as I am. I sent him a dub of an hour-long tape of classic TV show openings and he particularly loved the old cartoon themes. "The theme from *MILTON THE MONSTER* (a '60s toon) came on and I start singing, 'I'm Milton, your brand new sonnnnnnnnn!' Kelly (Jim's wife) comes into the room, yelling, 'What in the world is wrong with you?'"

If you ever talk to Cornette and it's around 11 o'clock, you find out that's typical supper time around the Corny household. Either that, or Jim tells everybody it's meal time, no matter the hour, when he needs to end a conversation. When he put on so much weight (ballooning over 250 pounds) in 1990, I asked him why. "Well, when I got on the booking committee, I'd sit here at the house when we were off and I'd work on these TVs. I'd work on them 'til four, five in the morning. And while I'd sit here, I'd eat. I'd probably eat the equivalent of four or five meals a day and I was doing it five nights a week."

Corny has the best answering machines of anyone in wrestling but he always enjoys mine. My first message was a parody on *DRAGNET*. Cornette left a message: "This is Joe Friday. I'm returning your call. I'm just leaving the facts, ma'am. Just the facts." One of my favorites (and his) was a *PERRY MASON* message where I said, "Mr. Mason, if you'll leave your name and number, I'll tell you everything I know. But I didn't kill Jim Cornette...even though I should have. Your witness, Mr. Mason."

My favorite *MATWATCH* parody came last April Fool's Day when I lured some people into actually believing Cornette was joining the pro bowlers' tour as a color commentator and part-time bowler. That prompted this message on Cornette's machine: "No, I'm not going to the WWF, back to WCW and I am definitely not joining the pro bowlers' tour." Jim told me it was surprising how many people actually asked him if he was going to the PBA. Satire is a dangerous tool.

I cannot tell you how much I admire this man's talent---and, more importantly, his principles. He has turned down a lucrative option to go to the WWF as Ric Flair's manager and ignored several overtures to come back to WCW as an announcer. Jim simply doesn't believe in their creative philosophy and he is trying very hard to re-establish his personal style of TV wrestling with his new Smoky Mountain promotion. The odds are against him in the current economic climate of television but I cannot think of anyone I hope succeeds more.

Perhaps the second-ugliest episode in the history of *MATWATCH* came in the spring of 1990. A Friday night. Ric Flair was supposed to drop the NWA world title to Lex Luger in Chicago. It was a thinly-kept secret. For nearly 30 days, a WCW employee was leaking it at all the tour's stops. I received calls from *MATWATCH*ers in at least seven cities to tell me Flair was dropping the belt. I was told face-to-face in Columbus GA. The story was if too much word spread, they would change the switch to St. Louis. WCW even arranged for Ross and Missy to do their wraparounds for *WCW MAIN EVENT* live that Sunday. That fact was even plugged on the Saturday night show.

I didn't go to Chicago but it began one of the most bizarre weekends in my association with the wrestling industry. The tale, as told to me by assorted sources, led to me, in part, being blamed for Flair not dropping the belt. Earlier that week, on my 900 *MATWATCH* segment, I said, "St. Louis is a city where wrestling history has been made. At least 12 times previously, the NWA world title has changed hands there. It is where Lou Thesz ended his final world title reign...because of all of these factors, I predict the time is right for Lex Luger to defeat Ric Flair for the belt this Saturday."

According to fans in Chicago, the intermission prior to the main event was interminable. What was going on in the dressing room was far more volatile than the ultimate title match. Flair was refusing to drop the belt by invoking a clause in his contract which afforded him what was tantamount to creative control over the belt's destiny. The place was in a furor. Events coordinator Gary Juster called Jim Herd, who had left the building.

Within two hours, I received a call from someone who still works within WCW, telling me Flair cited among the reasons he was keeping the belt was my commentary on the hotline. He was reportedly miffed at a "sheetwriter" being added to the 900 number. I never had the opportunity to ask Flair about it personally. But I did confront Herd the following Monday and played him the tape of my segment. "H--I, we said more than that on the air Saturday," Herd said. "Look, he's trying to get a contract extension out of us and that's all this is." If Ric's attorney Dennis Guthrie gets upset about that statement, I'm just quoting Herd. I've not had access to your client to ask his side.

Later that weekend, on Saturday, I received two calls from WCW personnel which I considered to be threats, one of them physical. When I wrote about it cryptically in *MATWATCH* the next week, former CWF announcer Charlie Platt called me immediately. "Is somebody trying to get at you?" asked Charlie. "You just tell me who it is. This business is getting sick. It's hot-shotted itself to death and they're desperate to keep it together. You let me know if there's anything I can do."

We had extraordinary calls of support, including from inside the company--particularly factions who were not in favor with Flair during his tenure as booker. But the factions didn't matter. I have had to dodge bullets intended for me when I reported in Columbus, I was once threatened by mayor's aide John Simpkins to throw me off the sixth floor of the Government Center in the city if he ever caught me alone. I had two anonymous threats on my life during controversial political coverage. Congressman Jack Brinkley once tried to have me fired by the president of Fuqua Communications when he was angered at my report on his stance on a superhighway in southwest Georgia. So, I'd had my life and my career flash before me. Usually, I don't take long-distance threats very seriously but this was 1990 and some emotions were running high about my association on the hotline. So, I called Petrik and Herd and volunteered to resign, telling them I was not going to subject my household to that kind of juvenile behavior. It wasn't worth it. Petrik promised to look into it and do what he could to get the parties off my back. I never had again had any telephone threats.

The telephone rang at five o'clock at WBBJ last September. "I'm sure you know who this is, so I won't waste any time, I'll get right to it. I've tried to track you down for a year," the voice spewed. "I even tried to get your number from WCW but those people have a combined IQ of about ten. Then, I remembered, you were a friend of Fred Ward's." Suddenly, it struck me: it was Ole Anderson.

Ole had been out as booker of WCW for nearly a year but was maneuvering to get back in favor with the company with reports surfacing of discontent over Dusty Rhodes' progress. I had not talked directly to Ole in 13 years--not since the night he threatened to throw me out of the dressing room in Columbus. I had just returned from spending the day with newly-crowned WBC heavyweight boxing champion Larry Holmes, who was visiting relatives in nearby Cuthbert, Ga. It was on the eve of the Muhammad Ali-Antonio Inoki mixed match in Tokyo. During my interview, which made the national ABC newsfeed, Holmes said he wouldn't mind taking on a wrestler, either.

I immediately called Fred Ward and asked if I could talk to some of the guys about the prospect. He said sure. I dropped in on Ole and he almost dropped on me. "Look here, you idiot," he said, staying in character, "If somebody wants to fight me, let him tell me that himself. And if you don't get that mike out of my face, I'm gonna stuff it down your throat."

Ole was something else. The year before at Christmas time, I was doing a feature story on a mind computer at a local mall. I happened to spot Ole. I asked if he would do a bit with me in my closing standup. He immediately barked at Santa Claus and shoved aside a man in line to do the segment. If I had known that was coming, I would have said, "Forget it."

I learned quickly a phone call from Ole becomes a monologue, rather than a conversation. In the next 45 minutes, I probably said eight sentences and asked four questions. "I always wondered why I'd pick up your sheet and read all of these things about me, and then I realized more than half of that stuff was coming from Jim Herd," said Ole. "You want to know what's wrong with that place? It wasn't me. It was Herd. It was idiots that don't know anything about wrestling."

I asked, "You mean when you told the guys your first night that you were turning back the clock to 1974, that was wrestling?" Said Ole: "I figured you were going to say that, since you wrote about it all the time. Tell me who's had the highest ratings on TBS. Tell me who put on the highest-rated *CLASH* on TBS. I did." I reminded Ole that while he had the highest-rated average Saturday ratings of any TBS booker, *MAIN EVENT* went as high as a 4.4 and *WCW* drew a 4.0 during Flair's regime. I also told him while he had the two highest-rated matches in cable history (Flair-Luger and Sting-Black Scorpion), Sputnik Monroe could have booked those matches and drawn a 6.8. I also reminded him he produced the worst *CLASH* ever, that abomination in Jacksonville with Luger-Motor City Madman and the horrendous Sid Vicious-Nightstalker affair. "I didn't produce that show," Ole insisted. "Those were all people Jim Herd wanted."

"Let me tell you what happened," Ole told me. "I quit the job after two weeks. I didn't go to the arenas. I didn't come into the office half the time. I didn't even really watch the TV shows that close." "Well, that was certainly fine leadership," I suggested. "You know why?" he said. "Because I had no say-so over the product. When it came to TV, Jim Ross had to have his input. Tony Schiavone had to have his. Herd wanted his. You couldn't control your own direction. They decided they wanted all of these big guys, and two-thirds of them couldn't pour p--- out of a bucket. Things are so bad in there now, it wouldn't surprise me to see Jack Petrik decide to get rid of wrestling altogether."

I confronted him about his first major angle, the racially-based Ric Flair-Junkyard Dog-Rocky King story in which King played Buckwheat. "Look, we had to do something to get people's attention and try to get more blacks back out to the matches," said Ole. "One of the reason they weren't drawing well at the gate was because the blacks were staying home. So, we tried to do something with shock value to get them back. One thing you can't argue about: the ratings went up with that angle."

The conversation ended just as abruptly as it began. "Look, we're probably going to need to continue this conversation at some point," said Ole. "Here's my phone number. You call it some time. I may answer it. I may not. I'll be in and out. It just depends on what mood I'm in. But you'll want to hear from me again." I haven't yet but I will say this: Ole was something else.

Jim Ross has taken an increasing amount of criticism in the last year and, frankly, I was not surprised. No, Jim didn't do the broadcast of a lifetime in every show but he was still on his game for the big matches and once he and Paul E. stopped their incessant arguing during their shows, Jim was as focused as ever.

The reason I was not surprised is Jim was suffering from the same vulnerability as Chris Schenkel did in the mid-1970s and Curt Gowdy in the early '80s. Schenkel was virtually the voice of ABC in the 1960s: college football, NBA basketball, the PGA, one season of baseball, the perennial pro bowlers' tour and figure skating at the Olympics. But eventually, the critics began to peck away, simply because of the sheer numbers of events he did. Gowdy probably called every major sporting event at one time or another from the late 1960s through the '70s: the perpetual voice of the World Series, the NCAA

the NCAA basketball championships, the Super Bowl and one Winter Olympics. Gowdy was even loaned to ABC for *THE AMERICAN SPORTSMAN*. But the critics eventually found their way into Gowdy's work like a computer virus, simply from familiarity. The same disease even struck the great Jim McKay at the 1984 Winter Olympics, Brent Musberger when he was fired at CBS for being "overexposed," and even the superb Dick Enberg has taken a few shots of late.

If Ross has suffered, it is my contention it has simply been from being on too many shows. But some of the criticism he has drawn in the past year has been ludicrous. Such as the one column I read calling him the most overrated announcer in the business. That writer is entitled to his opinion but I don't think it's a very educated one. The same person took Jim to task for talking about football during his shows and for appearing before and after many segments of his *POWER HOUR*. I have news for you. Jim's talking about football has only been in two contexts: one, if a wrestler has had a football background; or two, in an effort to make conversation with the viewers during a lull in a squash match. Some of the best baseball announcers make small talk about other subjects in-between balls and strikes. To a degree, it's the same as when someone strikes up a conversation with a fan at a game or card. Interestingly, Jim has taken shots for being too hard-sell. So, when he tries to loosen up with the viewers, he gets darts thrown at him from the other side. It's often a no-win situation as a broadcaster. I know. I've been there.

As for Jim appearing on-camera between segments, he is doing nothing any differently than when I have one of my anchors report on a story within a newscast. If that anchor has done reporting in the field, I want him or her to introduce that story and to close it with a post-tape "tag" on the set, so that the viewer can relate to that anchor as a reporter and as a person, more than simply a voice or a narrator. It is a style known in the industry as "wrapping a package" or "reporter involvement." It is a very effective style to give him, or any other on-camera talent, a more personal relationship with the viewers. If the hardcores get irritated with it, so be it.

When you want the great match called, you go with Jim Ross and you will for years to come, if you're smart. No one puts more pre-match preparation into a call (though Craig Johnson certainly does an extensive amount of homework) and no one can generate a non-artificial enthusiasm, as if he's still a fan, as can Ross when the rare classic appears. Simply stated, when one finally reaches the top of one's profession, one begins to take more potshots from critics. Success makes you an open target.

If there's one thing I wish Jim would reduce, it's the number of times he says a show is an "outstanding" broadcast. That word is as much a cliché as the word "great" is in sports and there simply aren't that many shows which can rate that term. But I also keep reminding myself, there is a far bigger audience out there than demanding hardcores and Jim is probably just trying to keep up the hard-sell.

In a nutshell, to my mind, Jim Ross' play-by-play engine cranks up just as well as it ever has. The addition of Jesse Ventura to WCW is only going to boost him on the big shows. But the only person who can replace Jim Ross is the next Jim Ross and I haven't seen him out there.

All of life brings us as many disappointments as joys. I am the kind of person who hurts and feels deep sadness when relationships are severed. That is one reason I spurned an offer to go to work for the Global Wrestling Federation because I just could not see myself working in an industry where relationships are so fragile. The egos and jealousies are delicate enough in local television.

Yet, I don't know of anyone who has become any bigger disappointment to me than Dennis Brent. I have related that several times in *MATWATCH* without naming his name. Dennis, as many of you know, is the Atlanta editor of *WCW MAGAZINE* and one with whom I once shared a friendly relationship. And I'm sorry to use the word "once."

Dennis was one of the first publishers to ask to trade for *MATWATCH*. I found his *PRO WRESTLING DIGEST* entertaining as it towed the line between kayfabe and believers. Brent was in the computer business and he gave me a lot of advice about what to look for in an upgrade when I moved off a Commodore-64. We developed a long-distance exchange and I enjoyed Dennis' sense of humor and his boisterous laugh.

When Sting won the WCW TV title at the premiere taping at Center Stage, I called Dennis the next day to tell him. Coincidentally, Sting was on the cover of his *PWD*, set to roll off the press the next week. So, Dennis became the first publisher to be able to label Sting "new world TV champion."

I knew Dennis wanted a crack at editing whatever publication Ted Turner's NWA would develop. The original *NWA WRESTLING WRAPUP* was floundering under Frances Crockett's supervision. I brought up Dennis' name to Jim Herd virtually every chance I had. I did so because I truly felt he could do the job and deserved a shot.

Dennis finally had an interview with Herd in Nashville. The next week, I wrote a followup letter to Herd unsolicited by Brent. I told him how strongly I felt about Dennis' qualifications and made a strong endorsement for him to become the editor of *WRAPUP*. I still have a copy of that letter.

To begin with, Brent continued to live in Dallas and commuted regularly to Atlanta for TV tapings and major shows. But I felt he gave the publication a personal touch and was improving it. However, Herd had some misgivings. In late 1989, before Dennis moved to Atlanta, I received a call from Herd. Pedicino told me to expect one. Herd said he was not happy with the look of *WRAPUP* and began fishing to see if I would have any interest in taking it over. I stopped him from the start. "Jim, let's don't take it any further," I said. "For two reasons: one, I think Dennis is doing a good job and if you feel there are problems, it may be because it's hard for Dennis to give it total supervision while he still lives in Dallas. I really think you ought to make it worth his while to move to Atlanta. Second, I never would attempt to get a job on the back of a friend and Dennis is a friend." Herd never brought it up again.

However, at *STARRCADE '89*, I detected a subtle change in Dennis which grew over the months. Dick Bourne and I had ridden up from Auburn and met Mike Gunter, who was in Atlanta on business. Dennis was taking pictures for the magazine. Afterward, as Dick, Mike and I were about to leave to join Joe and Boni for supper, Dennis cornered us and began to rave about what "great matches" we had seen. To be honest, there were a couple of matches which may have bordered on top-quality but most of the Ironman/Ironteam tournament was so-so or good because many of the guys tired after three matches each. Finally, I told Dennis, "Well, Flair-Sting and the post-match was great and the Steiner Brothers-Road Warriors was strong. But there were several matches that were a long way from great." Dennis piped up quickly: "Oh, no. You don't know what you're talking about. They were ALL great matches." Dennis began to talk like an NWA press release. Even Dick noticed it.

I next saw Dennis in Greensboro. He had moved to Atlanta and was now in the inner circle. I had just written a column critical of WCW for allowing Lex Luger to refuse to take the world belt from Ric Flair because, as I had been told, "He doesn't want the responsibility." I asked in *MATWATCH* if Luger's desires were more important than what was best for the company. And I suggested, to an admitted extreme, that the executives were losing control of the company. Dennis said hello and his next words were, "Listen, when you write things like you wrote this week, you don't know what you're talking about. You don't know what's best for the company and you only show what you don't know when you write it." I told Dennis, "That may be true. But I don't feel if it's good for business that Luger's personal wishes ought to override what's best for the company. He's being paid enough, anyway." But Dennis still took issue.

Next thing I knew, I was hearing almost weekly of Dennis making snide remarks about me. They would crop up, either at TV tapings, or in office meetings. I don't know if Dennis knew to what degree I knew of them.

He particularly began to excoriate me after I was assigned a night on The Wrestling Hotline. I don't know if it was because he felt as the magazine publisher, he should have had that night instead. But Dennis began to tell anyone who would listen that I had forfeited my rights to be critical of WCW in MATWATCH when I accepted the night on the hotline. Of course, Dennis was not privy to my conditions with Herd.

The final severance came the day after the *COASTAL CRUSH* card. That very week, I had written an extensive set of proposals for WCW which differed broadly with the direction Ole Anderson was taking the group. I even suggested the bizarre idea of bringing in Douglas Marland, an Emmy-winning soap opera writer, as a consultant to help them develop consistent continuing stories. Unconventional, yes, but it would have been better than Ole's 1974 and race-baiting episodes. I had set up my answering machine for opinions on the *CLASH*. When I returned home from work, the third message was from Dennis: "I'll give you an opinion, Steve, but it's not on the *CLASH*, it's on you. You know, you've lost a lot of credibility around here with that column you wrote this week. You do a lot of damage with the things you write and you have no business writing them because you don't know what you're talking about." The latter had become Dennis' All-Cliche Team phrase. "In fact, you don't know anything about wrestling, you don't know anything about journalism, and I don't think you know anything about television. I consider you very unprofessional." Dennis hung up without even so much as a goodbye. A great conversation for a friend.

I haven't talked to Dennis Brent since. I am not certain why, only that I still don't know what to say to him. He has done a good job of developing *WCW MAGAZINE* to the point where it has become part of the G.C. London family of newsstand publications. But he has a long way to go with interpersonal skills, particularly when it comes to accepting that people do have differing views from his. When Joe Pedicino jumped the gun and announced I was going to become host of *GEORGIA ALL-STAR WRESTLING*, a deal that was never consummated, Dennis was the first one in the office the next Monday morning to suggest I should be immediately dumped from the hotline.

Dennis has similarly turned on several of his other former newsletter friends, though not to the degree he has on me. In my view, he sank to an all-time low in bashing with his remarks on the first *GREAT AMERICAN FANS JAM* on the hotline two years ago, in which he repeatedly tongue-lashed "the sheets." I suggested to Herd afterward that it was fine for him to allow Dennis, Bill Apter and others to express their views about newsletters on the hotline. But I asked if he didn't think it was a double standard to criticize us for our alleged inaccuracies without giving us a chance to respond to Dennis' views. That led to the second *FANS' JAM* with Dave Meltzer, Wade Keller and me joining Herd and Lance Russell.

There's little I can say about this other than it has truly been a disappointment. I am a person who hurts when a friendship is lost, particularly when one does not understand why. Maybe one day I'll be able to again talk with Dennis. Maybe Dennis will eventually learn you don't have to turn your back on your friends simply because you are a company man.

Joe Pedicino left WCW in February 1990 under an amicable (at the time) parting with Jim Herd, if not everyone in the company. Frankly, he was relieved. The final six months had been painful, particularly when Flair took over as booker. Ric put up a wall between himself and many of the non-Crockett people. He canned Paul E. Dangerously. Eddie Gilbert was reduced to a match-opening, non-creative entity. He had long since moved in a booking committee meeting to remove Joe from the air. Pedicino had predominantly been working in the edit suite as a show editor.

Joe found himself increasingly being blamed for things, even when he wasn't around to suggest every existing creative idea was not made of genius. "I made my share of mistakes," he told me the day he and Herd mutually agreed he would not continue for a

second year. "But I don't think I've been nearly as much at fault as some of the people who have put themselves on pedestals." Joe just happened to have some different ideas, which many of the traditionalists did not want to hear. He reflected back on some advice given him by Larry Matyszyk the week before he went to work at Turner. "They're probably going to make a lot of mistakes the first year because these people are going to have to learn as they go," Matyszyk told Joe. "It may be better to wait and go in the second year when they have shaken out some of the problems."

At first, Herd stayed in touch and was friendly. However, the minute it became apparent Pedicino was going to try to launch the Global Wrestling Federation, Herd publicly became irritated. "Your friend is about to do himself a great disservice," Herd told me repeatedly, I'm certain in the hopes I would tell Joe.

What I admire most about Joe is his never-give-up intensity. He took enormous criticism when he failed to land the promised \$25 million from financier Olu Oleyami to get Global off the ground (for those so interested, Pedicino has not heard from Oleyami since Joe finally kicked him out of the Global plans last spring after deal after deal to gain financing became a "near-miss"). He could have easily washed his hands of all of it and in the midst of all the closet experts, said forget it. But he did something few people have been able to do, get a promotion going on a nationally-syndicated network and ESPN. That ESPN contract runs throughout 1992 and even if repeat matches are in abundance, the cable network seems happy with the packaging.

As I've said before, it would not have mattered to me if Global had been stillborn. I am proud of Joe for trying and even his critics cannot now say he has never been a wrestling promoter. I enjoy more the times when wrestling is not the focal point of the friendship. Such as when Joe and Boni visited us in Jackson for the weekend and Joe had an Italian combo with four different kinds of spaghetti sauce on the same plate at a local restaurant. "He sounded like a motorboat all night," Boni said.

Speaking of Boni Blackstone, if Missy Hyatt is arguably an embarrassment to the female sex in broadcasting, Boni and Kimberly Murphy are two women who have the chance to be breakthrough artists as women. Both of them deserve a big-time shot.

Boni will readily tell you when she began in 1986 as Miss Superstars of Wrestling for Joe's Atlanta mat marathon, "I was the bimbo." She is anything but now. Boni has worked hard at learning her craft. One of the best things that ever happened to her was when Joe went to WCW and Boni had to become the producer for *SUPERSTARS*. Structuring seven hours of television on a weekly basis is monumental. I know. I produce the equal to that every week at WBBJ. Boni demonstrated a creative flair, particularly through some of the video effects she developed for Samuel F. Kent's character as "Uncle Sammy." She has come a long way since being the girl who read the letters on *PRO WRESTLING THIS WEEK*.

I find ironic some of the criticism Boni received last year on the initial Global shows for some of her facial expressions during interviews she conducted. Funny thing is the very same week, I saw Tony Schiavone make exactly the same facial wrinkles and strains as Boni during every heel interview. But because Boni is female and blonde---and you can't convince me there is any other reason---the hardcores had a dying fit about Boni's looks of wonder as the heels spewed their threats.

Mrs. Pedicino has accomplished what she has through hard work---and it has been much tougher on her, being a woman. Go to any WCW or WWF show at The Omni and Boni is recognized by as many people as the wrestlers. And she has not had to embarrass or expose herself physically to achieve, as have others in the industry. If only Boni didn't like pink shutters on houses and didn't use the word "urp" for one's regurgitating actions.

As for Kimberly, I have never met her in person. But I can tell you, she is one heckuva communicator. She has built a strong following on Baltimore's *LARRY KATZ*

SHOW as one truly knowledgeable about wrestling and opinionated. She does her homework and you will find little, if anything, Kim cannot converse about in the mat game as articulately as any male.

Kimberly has subbed for Larry before and can keep radio talk conversation moving in a fluent fashion. It is definitely her medium. But I think Kim is capable of more, if only someone will give her a chance.

Wrestling, being controlled by males who maintain a traditional view, is far behind the times of television news. Not until the mid-1970s did local stations in grass roots America begin accepting women as news anchors. Why? They had never been tried in the role. Immediately, managers discovered the woman on the set was often the catalyst to draw both male and female sampling to a newscast. I don't understand why wrestling executives have not attempted that. To my mind (even though Mike McGuirk briefly did some for the WWF), Kimberly could become the first regular female play-by-play wrestling broadcaster. And I would challenge any national organization to give her an audition. What do you have to lose?

Dave Meltzer takes more criticism than any man in wrestling, Vince McMahon included. And I understand why, as well as anyone. Dave has opinions, does not hesitate to air them and does not hesitate to step on toes to express them. He is truly the fan's advocate and stands for promotional ethics, of which we frequently see little when it comes to truth-in-advertising from national companies.

I can tell you the man is, without doubt, the most secure and generous individual in his brand of journalism. Security is when one is self-assured enough to believe there is room for more than one's self in any area of life. That is indeed Dave. I do not have Dave's endurance for watching wrestling videos, or even late, late-night telephone calls. But I once said if I had the money to hire a quality investigative reporter, he would be the first I would call.

If you want to know why the mainline media is gradually opening up the burgeoning scandals within the WWF, Dave is part of the reason. Enough big-city columnists are aware of Dave's work with *THE WRESTLING OBSERVER* that they have finally decided it is time to dig up the graves. Meltzer has been writing about steroids and drug abuse for years. But it's taken more time for a mainstream media, so enthralled with the novelty of a "national" wrestling promotion and comic book heroes in the mid-1980s, to take more than an "oh, it's just wrestling" attitude toward the cancers within the industry. Many writers are just waking up to the fact that much of wrestling is children's television and the examples simply aren't as pure as the promotions have advertised. Dave has paved the way for that with years of pounding.

We first met at *THE ROAD TO BIRMINGHAM* in 1988 and Dave was wearing a pair of Zubaz pants before we knew what Zubaz was. When I went to San Jose for a news directors' convention two years ago, Dave was a gracious host. He toured me around his home area and I watched him devour a bowl of beef and rice at a Chinese restaurant.

Much of the modest success of MATWATCH is due, in large part, to Dave. He never failed to plug the newsletter when it was launching and when we made the announcement we were folding (only Joe and Boni and Rebecca knew in advance), the first person to call in an effort to get me to reconsider was Dave. "If you're giving it up for your health or your family, then that's one thing," Dave said. "But I just hope you won't give it up for all of the people who enjoy reading it and there are many of them, including me." It was, as Black Bart would say, dad-gummed classiest things.

I remember Jim Herd once telling me Kevin Sullivan had taken a foot ruler and measured the percentage of alleged inaccuracies in *THE WRESTLING OBSERVER* over a one-month period. If I were Dave, I would be flattered that the company cared that much. To be quite honest, I think it tells more about the mindset and time occupancy of Kevin Sullivan than it does about Dave's accuracy level.

They come and go but I have a tremendous affinity for broadcasters who have been able to launch radio talkfests across the U.S. Mike Tenay is coming on strong with his nationally-syndicated affair out of Las Vegas. Ric Carter has a creative effort in the same city. I have guested with Jody MacDonald and Rich Mancuso in New York and the fellows at Adelphi University in New Jersey are producing a literate program. Plus, even though it is geared toward the traditional fan, Jim Ross on Sunday nights in Atlanta sports an entertaining hour and does not dodge "smart" questions unless they would force him to divulge privileged information about WCW wrestlers or storylines.

But I have built a close bond with Larry Katz and John Arezzi. Larry has managed to keep his *PRO WRESTLING TALK* going for nearly three years, while having to move it to three different stations in Baltimore. But Katz has a loyal following. When he was off the air for approximately four weeks after the start of the year, I started receiving calls at home from Baltimore listeners wanting to know where Larry was. His "family" of regulars, including Jerry Moshenberg, Kimberly Murphy and, occasionally, Howard Goldman have made the show a kind of modern-day *ARTHUR GODFREY AND HIS FRIENDS*. Larry just hasn't fired anyone on the air.

As for Arezzi, he has become the best wrestling broadcast journalist on the air and he did not really intend for his *PRO WRESTLING SPOTLIGHT* to be an investigative show. *PWS* actually began as an informal radiofest in the Long Island area for the traditional fan. That has certainly changed.

Arezzi first opened the door to serious journalism when he invited both Ricky Steamboat and Jim Herd on his show on the same Sunday to discuss WCW's 1989 failure to renew Steamboat's agreement. The conversation became so intense and open that some wrestlers blindly felt it was "exposing the business" too much, an oxymoron if ever there was one.

Later, Arezzi was the first radio host to interview Superstar Billy Graham about his steroid revelations. From there, the door opened wide. Terry Funk and Chris Cruise both told their sides of why they left WCW (who can forget Terry acknowledging, "Why would anyone want to go up and down the road with Oily Anderson? With things like they are now, I don't want to be in the same room, I don't want to be in the same building, I don't want to even be in the same state with those people").

When Eddie Gilbert called Arezzi's show to call for the firing of Herd last fall, it was clearly evident John's had become the broadcast of record in wrestling. It remains 14 of the most dramatic moments in talk radio. Gilbert literally laid his career on the line and whether you agree with him, it was suspenseful.

But Arezzi's January interview with Graham and Dave Shults in which the two made revelations far beyond the brief piece on *INSIDE EDITION* was a tremendous piece of work. If anyone doubts how influential Arezzi has become, just examine how much of Phil Mushnick's January expose on the WWF consisted of quotes directly from Arezzi's Graham-Shults episode. The program fired a major shot in the continuing dismantling of the Hulk Hogan empire and cast the most serious doubt in the nation's largest market on the integrity of Vincent K. McMahon Jr.

John deserves to be on the 50,000-watt station which now airs him. I have no doubt that if the Titan empire continues to crumble, John will be at the forefront of it---not by malicious intent but by a fierce desire to get to the truth. Wrestlers trust him. Listeners believe him. He makes the field of mat broadcast journalism respectable.

When Jim Herd resigned, I wrote about both the side of Herd many people did not see---one who could be friendly and uproarious in his sense of humor. But I also wrote of three times when I experienced the same dark, combative side of Herd most of his employees found in him.

The first time was when reports surfaced that TBS was considering a sale of World Championship Wrestling. The stories, indeed, were circulating among people outside of

WCW. It was May 1990 and I received a call from a MATWATCHer sportswriter friend who covers the NBA and was at the playoffs. "You ought to check this out," my source said. "I've talked to some people connected with the Denver Nuggets and their owners are looking closely at buying Turner's wrestling company. It's really serious." The Denver team was owned by a partnership of a minority group and Comsat Video Enterprises, which was heavily into research for Direct Broadcast Satellite and pay-per-view in hotels and motels. Meltzer had heard a similar story. Pedicino had received a call from someone in a rival wrestling group about the alleged talks. I made some calls and found enough trustworthy sources that I felt it was worth reporting the talks. I was not the first. Joe was on his personal 900 number. Dave had it in the next week.

One of the first I heard from was not Herd but Ross. "Where did you get that from?" he asked. "We don't know anything about it here and I know we would have." Logically, Jim was right. But that is not necessarily true. Twice, when broadcasting companies I have worked for negotiated sales of our television stations, the employees—including some of the key managers—found out when the story cleared the Associated Press wire.

Later that day, I heard from Herd. "You and I are on a collision course," Herd bellowed. "@!#! @#! you, writing that stuff. You've created chaos in this entire building. I can't get any work done today from people ringing my phone." After listening to him for five minutes, I finally told Herd if he wanted to call back and talk to me in an articulate fashion, I'd talk to him but I was not going to listen to his blatant profanity. I did not have to take that. He finally eased his anger.

As it turns out, both Herd and I discovered on the same day how the story had indeed been circulating in the NBA meetings and it even finally reached the "Buzz" column in *VARIETY*, the show business trade weekly. The tale was being planted by Art Sando, a former TBS executive recruited for Comsat by Bob Wussler, the one-time TBS executive vice president, who was now heading Comsat. Sando was apparently attempting to build big publicity for his boss. Jack Petrik issued a denial to me and to *VARIETY* about the story and the entertainment mag wrote TBS was chalking it up to Sando trying to get revenge on the Turner company. But I at last knew the steam, first-hand, which people had told me would come out of Jim Herd.

The next time was only three months later. I had made two weeks worth of comments on the hotline challenging some of Ole Anderson's creative decisions and said that the Black Scorpion's voice was nothing more than Ole's distorted on tape. And, to begin with, that horrible, "Come....Sting!" was nothing more than Anderson. "You're deliberately trying to create problems between me and my booker. That's all you're doing and you're doing it because you don't like Ole," Herd screamed. "How dare you tell that stuff on the hotline." I let him scream out and then I said, "Okay, Jim. You said you didn't want to muzzle me and you wanted me to be opinionated. All right, I didn't like the racial angle and the Black Scorpion thing is just plain dumb...and you've already made the guy who should be the most over thing in wrestling into somebody scared of his own shadow. What kind of a world heavyweight champion is that?" Said Herd: "All I know is you and I are about to be on a collision course." Jim said that a few times, didn't he. When I told that to others in the company, they howled. It was a favorite catchphrase when Herd would blow up in the office, which was often.

But never have I been subjected to such profanity, anger and irrational speech as when I quoted Herd's comment about Flair's honesty. It was no secret Herd had made that comment around the office on a regular basis. The office staff knew it. The bookers knew it. Half the wrestlers knew it. Even Jack Petrik knew it and warned Jim to cool it. But when I picked up the phone on that Thursday morning, I didn't even get a hello. "Well, you've succeeded in getting my ass fired by Petrik," screamed Herd. I thought he was joking. "I can't BELIEVE you'd DO this to me. As much as I've cooperated with you. As long as I've stuck up for you and you'd DO this to me! I just don't understand this. You've got to make this right with Petrik." I didn't even know know what Herd was boiling about. I would not receive a call threatening a lawsuit

from Flair's attorney Dennis Guthrie until the next Monday. "You don't know what this Guthrie's like! He's probably going to try to sue me over this," Herd yelled.

"Well, Jim, you said it. And I quoted it," I said. "But it was OFF-THE-RECORD and you KNOW I told you it was OFF-THE-RECORD!" he argued. "Jim, I am human and I can be mistaken. But in this case, I still have the notes. You told me three other things during that conversation which you specifically stated were off-the-record: one about Nikita Koloff, one about negotiating with Rick Rude and one about a disciplinary action. You didn't say what you said about Flair was off-the-record," I answered. "Well, you need to call Petrik and tell him that this was all a misunderstanding, that we have had conversations about this over a period of five or six weeks and you just didn't understand what I said," Herd directed. "Jim, I'll call Jack. But I'm not going to lie for you," I said. "I will tell him the circumstances over this. But I'm not going to tell him it was off-the-record. Because, even though it's your word against mine—in my mind, it was not—otherwise, I would have never written it. And in three years, I have never quoted you on an off-the-record statement and you know it." Herd's parting shot:

"Well, I'm about to ruin a 20-year friendship with Jack Petrik and you're the reason."

I hardly agreed with Jim but I called Jack. I outlined the situation, as I saw it. I will not detail the specifics of that conversation because I promised Petrik I would not. However, I will tell you Jack did not hold me responsible for it. Frankly, he was sorry Flair left and felt if he and Ric had been able to sit down together, an arrangement could have been struck to keep him. But Herd and Dennis Guthrie were like lightning rods with each other. The following week, I agreed to write a statement in MATWATCH to indicate it was not my intention, as publisher, to question Flair's honesty. I was merely quoting someone who did so. I have regretted every day doing that because I don't think I owed it to either Guthrie or Flair. But I do not have an attorney to handle a legal challenge for the newsletter, in the same fashion as I do in my television station. So I wrote the statement. It's done and I hope Guthrie was thrilled with it.

The day after Herd's call, a WCW insider visited me for lunch in Jackson. When I related the story, he laughed. "Steve, you ought to just sit back and revel in all this great power you have," the insider said. "I don't know of anyone as powerful as you are. You made the world heavyweight champion decide not to drop his belt. You've gotten Jim Herd fired. Sit back and enjoy it, pal." Cornette called to ask, "How do you manage to make both Jim Herd and Dennis Guthrie mad at the same time? I didn't do that and if anybody could have, it was me." Pedicino told me, "If Herd gets fired over this, you realize you're going to be a hero to a lot of people. Think about it. The man nine-tenths of WCW want out and you're the reason. And, of all things, you're the guy some of the other sheet writers felt Herd had in his hip pocket. What a guy!" As I told Joe, if I am going to be a hero, that's not the way I'd prefer it. And as my visitor to Jackson told me, that wouldn't be the way it was. "Steve, if Jim Herd gets fired, it's going to be because he's done it to himself," the guest told me. "He has shot from the hip so many times, he's just lucky something like this hasn't happened before now. If he gets the ax, Jim Herd will be the reason and it will be because of his performance over three years as the chief operating officer of World Championship Wrestling."

The vision has changed dramatically at WCW in just three months. Kip Frey has not made pretenses of deep knowledge about pro wrestling but is quickly learning. He is doing so in a low-key, non-abrasive, businesslike fashion which is winning him the kind of early respect Herd did not earn.

The overriding question is whether wrestling in general will undergo a black hole, in general, with all of the negative publicity on the WWF in its role as the acknowledged leader of the industry. Kip is making a lot of positive moves. But I'm not sure if wrestling is not going to continue in a general malaise until its exposure is lessened and its scandals diminish. That is going to take a lot of time and reconstructed attitudes.

Chapter Five

Coming Back

The night of June 11, 1991 would change my life forever. A night when not wrestling, not the six o'clock news, not any amount of material worth, not MATWATCH would matter. A night I would learn life is not measured in any degree of importance but the priorities you place in it.

For more than a year, I had been working under an enormous strain. Some of it was self-applied guilt for accepting a job with a broadcasting company which was ill-equipped to deliver to viewers in a 17-county area the proper technical professionalism in television news. A company which, to be quite honest, lied to me about its capabilities and desires for its station and what it was willing to do to lift it from a level one clapboard away from a collapse. A terribly inaccurate picture was painted for me and I felt terribly guilty for not being more perceptive at the age of 36 and having heard every used-car salesman-type pitch from station managers, I should have known better.

When I agreed to come to WBBJ-TV as news director, I knew from a limited observation how terrible the product was. The day I came to interview and the day we came to look for a home, the station did not have one local news story on the air. And there seemed to be no remorse about it. That should have been enough of a clue. But I told Rebecca I honestly felt I was needed there and with the pledge I had of the company's willingness to move forward and give us the tools necessary to revamp and revive, I felt I had one more news department in me.

I take responsibility for what has happened here. While I have had encouragement from an enormous number of people in Jackson and west Tennessee, including a percentage of my staff, as to what improvements have been made, the toll it has taken on me physically and emotionally has---to be truthful---not been worth it. Further, the malaise of our absentee ownership in Charlotte, N.C., has led us to a plateau beyond which we can grow without more funding and attention. If you wonder if this is a behind-the-back slap, the answer is no. I have said this to members of the ownership family on more than one occasion, including in the spring of 1991 when I resigned to take a college job in Georgia and later rescinded it after a renewed commitment on their part to finally pay attention to our needs. So, I had my chance to leave and did not. I do not know what that says for me.

The lack of manpower was forcing me to work 10, 12, 14-hour days, consistent weekends and into a substitute role for virtually every person who had time off coming. It goes with the territory in a small market where resources and personnel are limited. But this was blatantly ridiculous. Physically, the demands on me were so great, I do not know how I managed to maintain a weekly pro wrestling newsletter. Anyone who has been in the role can understand---and shake his head.

Every spring in west Tennessee, all of the little communities around Jackson have various city-wide festivals. There's a strawberry festival, a teapot festival, even a "doodle

soup" festival. For seven consecutive weekends, they roll on. In 1990, before my arrival here, the station had gone seven months without a news director or general manager. So, the leadership to understand how important coverage is to these little towns in our size television market was not there. Like many businesses, we are on a no-overtime situation with our personnel. And my young people make very little money. So, for seven straight Saturdays (and some Sundays) last spring, I made the trudge to the various festivals for our weekend newscasts. Plus, a couple of serious news stories broke on weekends and I was pressed into service for them. All the while, I was continuing to try to watch as much wrestling on Saturday and Sunday as possible and attempt to maintain some degree of standards for MATWATCH.

My mind kept trying to push forward but my body was eroding as sand on a beach during a hurricane. It was like a clashing of a cold front and warm front to cause massive thunder and lightning. Plus, I was not giving Rebecca the attention she deserved on weekends and I am fortunate enough to have what I feel is life's most wonderful wife. Not even my dog and three cats were getting the kind of care they needed from one of their two "parents." All the while, the internal guilt continued to mount. Plus, tensions were increasing within the news staff. We were on the verge of making some major changes in the broadcasts. Not all of the staff members understood those changes, nor accepted them. It's nothing new. In television news, everyone feels they're the best there ever was and if they aren't placed in the position which they see as giving them the most prestigious exposure, they pout, rail or blame the boss. The latter is probably accurate because there has to be one boss. It's never easy to make changes. Ask any college or NFL coach who has to change his staff or player alignment. And I have never been one of these steely, cold-hearted bosses. But if there weren't significant problems when I was brought in, they would not have needed me at WBBJ (somehow, I'm going to kill Dick Byrd of The Weather Channel for recommending me here. I will definitely get a parting shot one day on Bud Borchert, the former company hack who interviewed me for the job and is one of America's top snake oil salesmen. If Bud is ever in one of those charity dunking booths, I am going to buy up 100 chances at him and hope I hit the target even 10 per cent of the time). I took a year to study the needs, the personnel and the problems to thoroughly understand what was needed and have attempted, in spite of the corporation's inattention, to do what we could to make corrections and improvements. Ratings---and, particularly, demographics have improved for news despite incursions of cable in the Jackson market. But you could feel the tension when we finally announced the changes---and with some of these being younger people and veterans within the station, it did not make things pleasant at times.

Some weeks, I was terribly unhappy with MATWATCH. It just would not click the way I wanted, though readers---other than with increasing snipes by Wade Keller---kept trying to encourage. Probably Joe Pedicino and Boni were the only industry-related people who really knew the depth of what I was experiencing. I was beginning to undergo a phenomenon known as the "Sunday blues," an emotional trauma in which one begins to dread the start of the week about 12 hours before Monday because of a lack of satisfaction or fulfillment in the workplace.

Rebecca and I have not been blessed with any children (we hope to adopt soon) but, believe me, I have had plenty of experience raising them. Even those over 35 in the newsroom sometimes behave in that fashion and that wears on a manager. Between petty bickering, personality clashes (which amplify in an ego-driven nprofession) and jealousies, one sometimes feels as if one is a referee. When I have related many of the daily stories to Joe, he has often asked, "Are you sure you aren't working for WCW?"

The night of June 11 had been an exceptionally tense day. It was the first day of a new format with a male-female co-anchor team debut and the female premiering as a solo for the late newscast. There was a sense of positive anticipation on the part of many within the station. Yet, I knew there was one person in particular who been unsparing in his behind-the-back desires for this woman to fail. It was one who publicly

professed to be a "team player." That would exist until this person felt he was being devalued, when, frankly, he had it made.

The tensions mounted to the point that when I arrived home that evening, I was a wreck. Before I could even sit down to eat, two calls came from the newsroom about unimportant issues the people could either have solved themselves or waited until the next day to handle. Finally, I was able to finish supper and sat down to print the mailing labels for a MATWATCH issue I think may have been one of the poorer I had done. I just didn't feel there was any strength to it and I felt badly about that. Around 9 p.m., yet another call came from the newsroom. Rebecca answered and told me who it was and that was it. It was the banjo string which finally had stretched too far and snapped. I could not take the call. I could not get myself under control for nearly 90 minutes. All of the internal tension and, if you will, anger at myself for putting us in this professional situation for more than a year, finally spilled out as I knew in my own mind it finally would. Much of it was because I was beyond the point of physical exhaustion.

Rebecca pleaded with me not to work the next day but I felt compelled to go. I went for two more days and the night of the 14th, I came in the house, fell apart, and said the three words I feel were the most significant I could say, "I need help." I knew I could not continue in the fashion I was. I had inadequate numbers of personnel at WBBJ and at least two of those I knew would conspire behind my back at any effort at change in the newsroom. Both of them are great closet news directors. The only reason they are still on staff is because they have not been nailed in the process of it. Physically, I could not go on. Eventually, it had to have an effect on the emotions. I did not realize it at the time but I was having a nervous breakdown.

I could not go to work the next day, nor could I answer any calls over that weekend, except from Joe. He and Boni had been worried for months about how I was holding up. They called almost daily. But I could not talk to others for about a week, things were at such a low point. I was receiving phone messages from people at a pay-per-view weekend saying Keller and Mark Madden were saying rather uncomplimentary things about me and they felt I should know. Wade has done a wonderful job with *PRO WRESTLING TORCH* but he still has a bit of maturing to do, particularly when he gives someone a "Torch Turkey" award and calls the person in advance to say "gobble, gobble" on the phone. That's very adult behavior. At least being placed in the same turkey list with Jim Ross and Bill Watts put me in high company and I was flattered. As for Madden, I have never met him, so it really was unimportant what he or Wade said.

What was important is I was sick and it was not an illness from which I would recover in a week. It would mean taking slow, deliberate, almost baby steps back to one's old self. I recognized I could not do it by myself. I was referred to Dr. Lorne Semrau, a wonderful psychologist who has helped me focus on the fact that the things about which I had internalized such guilt were primarily not my fault. Over a period of months, he has helped me see there are some things I can control and the things I cannot, I simply cannot worry about as I have in the past.

As I began to be able to talk to a few folks, I received an overwhelming number of encouraging letters and calls from MATWATCHers who shared with me similar experiences. Some either in their families or within themselves. So many, many---I would guess 200 or more---sending messages with the recurring theme, you are not alone. We know where you've been. All of this helped. You will never know how much. A couple of wrestlers and managers called to say "hang in there," because you would be surprised the number of people within wrestling who have experienced emotional difficulties. As one whom I consider one of my closest friends in the business (you know who you are) told me, "The problem is with those who can't bring themselves to admit and get help." Outside of Joe and Boni, no one within the industry called more to simply say, "How are you?" and check on my recovery, instead of just to pass along wrestling gossip. He genuinely cared and tried to keep me focusing on getting well.

I was largely out of my office four out of six weeks. I made the mistake of trying to come back too quickly. I lasted two days and had a relapse. Another two weeks at home to rest and refocus. My doctor told me not to worry---it happens to many people who have emotional illnesses. The tell-tale of my professional feelings can be summed up in the fact that during the two months I was in the depths of depression, largely as a result of the inattention of our company, not once did I receive a note or phone call of encouragement from anyone within the Bahakel corporate offices and they did know of my illness.

Ironically, one person who expressed remorse at the ending of MATWATCH was Jim Herd. When I called him back to tell him of the status of my attempts to reach Petrik about his quote concerning Flair, Herd was much calmer. He said, "The newsletters are just driving our business." I told him, "Well, Jim, after January 27th, there's one you won't have to worry about." He asked, "Which one is that?" I said, "Mine." Emotionally, Jim said: "Well, why would you want to do that?" I answered, "Jim, I've had a nervous breakdown and getting rid of MATWATCH is going to help me get well." He appeared genuinely concerned and sincere when he said, "We've got to talk about this. You're one of the few who genuinely cares about this business and even when you take issue with us, you're always fair. Gosh, I'm sorry. I didn't know."

Eventually, Dr. Semrau advised me if I was to come all the way back, I would have to begin to prioritize my life and get rid of some things which were weighing too heavily on me. I have been actively seeking for a year to leave WBBJ and move back into the college environment which, though ripe with politics, is a more relaxed workplace. With the recession, it is a tight job market for communications instructors and is tough to crack a college. I was offered a job at Kilgore College in Texas in late November but on my interview, though they were very nice, I found a program in as tragic a shape as WBBJ was when I arrived. I simply don't want to clean up another mess. But I am still trying---and if any of you know of a college or university looking for a broadcasting, broadcast journalism or speech communication teacher, let me know. I'll have my application there immediately.

I knew, realistically, it was time for MATWATCH to go. At my age and with the pressures of what I still do for a living, I could not maintain the excellence I felt readers had come to expect. We surveyed our subscription list and determined if I could hold out until the end of January, we would only have to pay out nine refunds. So, I told Rebecca Jan. 27 was the date and that was it. I told my doctor and he said, "Good. You have made a positive decision to say, 'I don't choose to put myself under this pressure any more.'" And since the last weekend in January, I have not looked back.

There are weekends when it feels a bit strange. The last time I left daily television for the college campus, it took six months before I could hear a siren go off without rushing to the window to look at what was happening. It is different not to be feverishly jotting down every Line of the Week imaginable. However, it feels good not to be under that strain. Rebecca and I in less than two months' time have gone out to eat more, played with the animals more and enjoyed going to community events more than we probably have in the last two years. I'm not under the pressure to get back home and see another wrestling show, or watch it back on videotape.

As for the physical and emotional strains, we are taking one day at a time. I am probably 90 to 95 per cent of the way back. For about a month or two after returning to work, I was only putting in four to six-hour days. By fall, I was able to get back to a full schedule but no more of this weekend and evening business. As I told my boss, either get me enough help in here to get the job done right or there are simply some stories which won't get covered. If that's not good enough for WBBJ, then I suppose it will have to get another news director. If that's the way the economics of this business is going to be in Jackson, TN, then that is simply the way it will have to be. But I'm not going to die for Cy in '92," Cy being Cy N. Bahakel, the owner of WBBJ and seven other television stations.

During the Christmas and New Year break, I had a bit of a setback. Depression set it again and my doctor said that was not unusual. Being away from the workplace and then having to return to what is still somewhat of an unpleasantly stressful situation at times creates depression. But I have been able to cope, slowly and gradually, by working at it--as the old cliché goes, Jim--one day at a time.

In a sense, that's the message I would like to share with all of you and why I have been as open about my illness. It can happen to anyone at anytime and the warning signs are sometimes right before you. But you have to recognize them, admit them and if the situation is serious enough, try to seek help. If you do, you can and will make it back. But you have to take things very slowly.

To those who follow wrestling to the extent that it becomes the cure-all and end-all of life and is the barometer by which friendships are made or broken, I suggest you re-evaluate your priorities. Wrestling is a wonderful, entertaining pastime if it is kept in perspective and not an obsession. Unfortunately, I think there are a few of the prairie dogs who have crossed that line and allowed the mat to become their gauge of people. How pitifully sad that is. Wrestling newsletters are a lot of fun but when they deteriorate into personal attacks on people who have differing views, simply because they have differing views, people haven't learned much about conducting interpersonal relationships.

For someone who has been an achiever and a "type A" personality with a traditional work ethic, this was almost inevitable. The body and the mind are somewhat like a computer facing the Michelangelo virus. Eventually, if you do not take precautions, something is going to shut you down. It is not fun. You almost have to completely relearn how to live life. But it can make you a better person. However, I do not recommend anyone going through it.

I am not retiring from the newsletter business. I have shifted gears to a much more leisurely monthly publication called FLASHBACK, which is a "remember when" look back at one of my passions in life, nostalgic television: the old series of the 1950s, 1960s and '70s, which most of us over 30 grew up with almost as parts of our families. And I hope if you like those programs, or are a fan of NICK AT NITE, you'll take us up on an offer of a free sample issue.

What I have learned in the last year, in particular, is no job, no company, no situation and certainly not professional wrestling is worth destroying one's health. Eventually, the body won't work any more and we all have to die. But life is too precious and too short for us to kill ourselves over things we cannot totally control. With the help of my doctor, I have re-accepted the fact that I am a good broadcaster and a quality leader, whether all of my staff buys into that, or not. I have something to offer as a teacher, which I try to give every Tuesday and Thursday morning at Jackson State Community College and every Monday night at Dyersburg State Community College. I have the best wife life could have brought me. A circle of friends I can count on in both the ups and downs of the world. And I will do the best I can. That is all I can do. It is all part of coming back. Coming back to life.

Chapter Six

Epilog

The end of MATWATCH has been much the same as when Andy Williams, Dick Van Dyke or Jack Benny ended their weekly series and came back in a series of specials. I am not even ready to commit to that infrequent a schedule yet but I seriously doubt I will become a wrestling recluse, though I am no longer magnetized to the tube every Saturday.

But after a much-needed rest, I am certain I will have some things to say in some kind of forum---what, I don't know. Rossie has even suggested doing five or six lengthy issues a year, something on the order of pay-per-view shows, only mine would be pay-per-read.

As a broadcaster who has a responsibility to all age brackets, I am vitally concerned about pro wrestling living up to its responsibility, particularly where the child audience is concerned. I have to look on its content as more than simply "it's just wrestling," because of the license my station has and the large amount of money wrestling takes home from child and teen-oriented merchandising.

Recently, my station, WBBJ, just passed on a pitch to bring the Memphis USWA show back to channel 7. We did so for two reasons: one, we don't feel it is in our best interest to merely rebroadcast an edited version of what WMC carries the week before on Saturday morning, when that Memphis station is on every cable system in our market. But primarily because of being repeatedly repulsed with that program's continuing men-hitting-women or abusing women storylines. That kind of violence in a blue-collar market which has a high statistic of domestic crime has no place on our air.

Vince McMahon has much for which to answer. He has been the most prolific and financially profitable enterprise within his field for nearly a decade. And he has largely been the most creatively irresponsible. But no more so than in the last year when he exploited a war during its actual conflict, when he has produced programs which have been literally capable of giving children nightmares and when he has virtually thumbed his nose at a public by allowing his most celebrated superhero to deceive people about his past on a widely-watched national talk show.

WCW has not been all angelic. It has had its share of steroid users, as well. And if Kip Frey's comprehensive steroid policy, which is the only one of its kind in writing and available to the public in the industry, is to work, WCW's wrestlers are going to have to change a few attitudes. The policy and p.r. campaign are off to the right start---now, we'll see over time how seriously the wrestlers take it. There are incentives for them financially to comply. But above that, the greatest incentive should be in being the proper role model for those who buy the tickets to watch them.

I do believe, overall, this is not going to be a good year for pro wrestling if the negative publicity---and it will be deserved, in most instances---proliferates. In fact, I

predicted several years back to Joe Pedicino that wrestling will be its own worst enemy in its excesses and overexposure. Now, its own internal sins are the cancers. And I truly believe all organizations now have to worry about the effect the potential scandals on the McMahon organization are going to have on national advertisers which have aligned themselves with the mat game to reach a kid/teen audience. If they begin to back away, the boom is over.

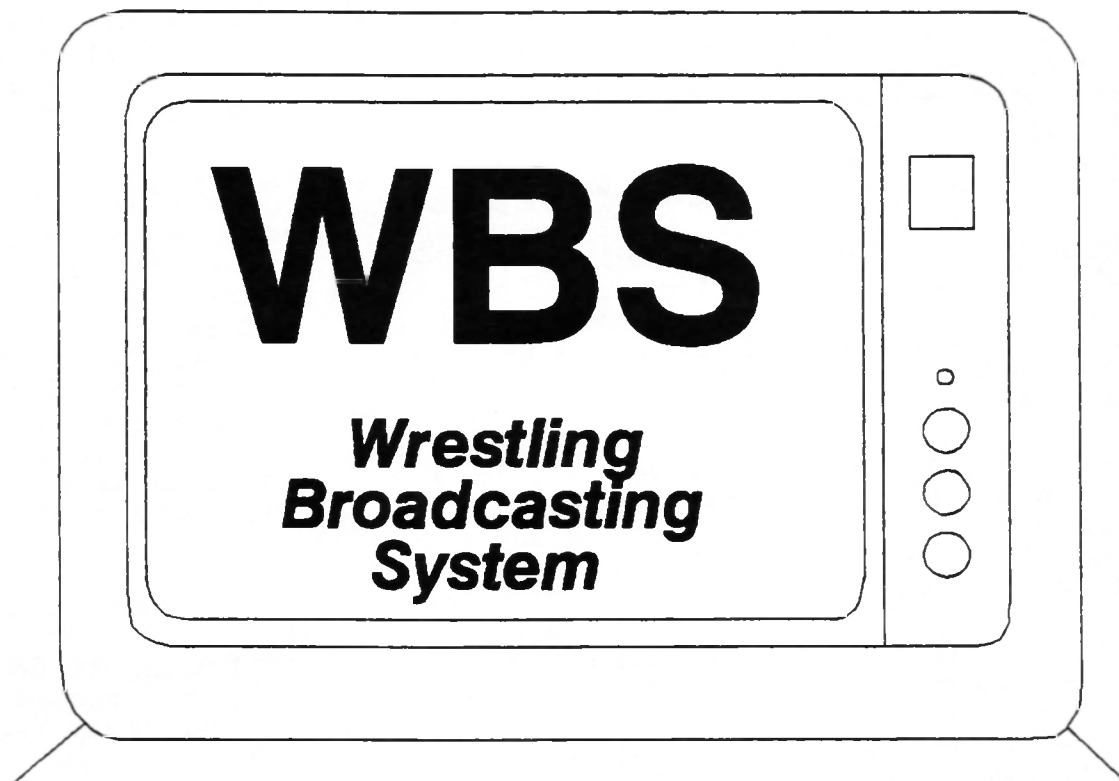
Promotion executives have to ask themselves the question how much pay-per-view the public can stand, particularly when other sports and events are increasingly entering the field. As Lance Russell has pointed out often during the recession, the amount of discretionary or disposable income people have to spend on pay events has to be restricted in this current era of tight personal budgeting. I still truly believe the day will come, if for no other reason than necessity, that wrestling will evolve into an event-of-the-month business augmented by weekly TV, rather than maintaining the weekly tours throughout the country. It simply is no longer special enough for the public to support. When WCW people brag about doing \$36,000 houses because they're up, I look at the payroll and building rents and continue to be amazed how or even why they are keeping up this night after night grind. Don't be surprised if McMahon has to have another round of layoffs this year. After totally blowing whatever bonanza there was in a Hogan-Flair pay-per-view main event, this upcoming *WRESTLEMANIA* will only be an unqualified success in the p.r. offices of Titan Sports, even if Flair and Randy Savage have the best match in the last five years. The flagship show will not make the money McMahon has budgeted, so further cuts will likely have to come.

Frankly, the time has come for McMahon to pull himself away from the creative end for a year. He may have to with all of the increasing time he is having to spend defending himself, his company and some of his employees against potentially felonious charges. But the man has demonstrated a huge burnout factor in the confusing matchups and lack of continuity which was always the WWF's past hallmark. It would be no disgrace. Let someone else take the reins and guide it. Heck, WCW may even be willing to give him back Dusty Rhodes.

What saddens me about the direction of wrestling the last five years has been that it really is nothing special any more. The anticipation is largely gone. The mystique of having those one or two weekly television shows in your area has evaporated. And those who maintain the facade of "protecting the business" have only been fooling themselves. Perhaps wrestling was more fun in that era but it was inevitable that national touring promotions with syndicated television and network exposure would be openly exposed by a tenacious media. If Eddie Mansfield hadn't done it in 1985, someone else would have.

I am still having a bit of fun, producing a weekly wraparound segment for my station's *WCW PRO WRESTLING* airing. Before the show, at the mid-point and at the end, a station character under the name of Churnin' Charlie Davis is your local host, in much the same fashion as your old-time horror movie show hosts. We try to keep a running storyline going which lampoons Churnin' Charlie, who takes it all in great fun. Currently, Charlie is in the middle of an eight-week program in which a wrestling fans' committee, headed by a man named John Hill, is petitioning the FCC to have Charlie removed off the air for being "obnoxious, irritating and having a voice like a rusted pipe." Those are the fun things left in wrestling for me.

I hope this industry will begin to clean up its act. The brushes with the law, the dates in the courtroom and the physical abuses and lies are, frankly, becoming a huge turn-off with the audience---not just the newsletter editors and subscribers. True, there are still those who will call John Arezzi, no matter what, to ask, "Eh, John, do you know yet what the matches are for *SUMMER SLAM*?" But those are growing fewer in number. Whether the scandals have any more of a negative effect on ratings or attendance is not the issue. The issue is whether this industry's leaders are willing to stop living lies, in the midst of their creative fiction. I challenge them to do so, not only for the fans' benefit---but their own. Saturday, March 7, 1992: The Day the Writing Stopped.



6:30 A.M.

(3) BLACKSTONES—Cartoon

Fred fills his tank and walks into a convenience store to tell the clerk, "I've got gas." Wilma says, "Gas? Fred, you've had gas for 10 years." VoicesWilma: Boni Blackstone. Fred: Joe Pedicino. Barney: Ronnie Garvin. Betty: Kelly Cornette. Mr. Slate: Jim Herd. Dino: Jim Cornette.

(9) FRUGAL GOURMET—Jeff Smith

Jeff's guest is Wade Keller, who demonstrates how to cook torched turkeys. Wade burns himself in the process.

(38) MORNING DEVOTION—Slick

Rev. Slick's guest parishioner is Diamond Dallas Page, who speaks on the subject, "Good God."

7 A.M.

(3) GOOD MORNING AMERICA

Paul Heyman returns to substitute for a week while Charlie Gibson goes on the road to manage the Dangerous Alliance. In the first five minutes, Paul reveals the entire sordid details about Joan Lundden's impending divorce, clobbers Spencer Chris-

tian with his phone during the weather and demands to be paid \$225,000 to come back as guest host next year. (2 hrs.)

(9) TODAY

Eddie Gilbert appears to discuss his new book, "Tricky Dick Nixon Taught Me Everything I Know." Former President Richard Nixon appears to discuss his new book, "I Never Knew Anything." Jim Ross offers Katie Couric a chance to go on the road to manage Richard Morton, Thomas Rich and the Taylor-Made Man in a new group called the Couric Corporation. (2 hrs.)

(38) CBS THIS MORNING

Guest Paul Bearer offers tips on how to have an inexpensive funeral. Herb Abrams presents exercise advice by showing how to walk around a convention floor with Steve Williams. (2 hrs.)

9 A.M.

(3) DONAHUE—Discussion

Phil's guests are Michael Hayes and Jimmy Garvin, who try to defend why they can't lip-sync any better than Milli Vanilli at a *CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS* card. (60 min.)

(9) GERALDO—Discussion

Geraldo's guest is Dave Shultz, who brings out an Uzi and a bazooka when audience member Steve Flannamenta suggests Shultz is just trying to sell a book. (60 min.)

(38) RUSH LIMBAUGH—Discussion

DEBUT: In a new TV version of his daily radio show, Rush tells his audience, "Missy Hyatt looks like someone you could get a disease from but wouldn't mind it."

10 A.M.**(3) LOVE CONNECTION—Game**

Host Chuck Woolery brings together Thomas E. Gilbert II and Debra Ann Miceli but Missy Hyatt bursts onto the set and tells Debra she should sign a pre-nuptial agreement.

(9) FAMILY FEUD—Game

Host Ray Combs asks Rick Steiner to "name your favorite rodent." Rick answers, "My saxophone."

(38) LET'S MAKE A DEAL—Game

Host Monty Hall offers Steve Borden \$10,000 and a world title shot if he won't take the box where Medusa and Lex are hiding.

10:30 A.M.**(3) TO TELL DeTRUTH—Game**

Hulk Hogan and a team of imposters attempt to stump the panel as to which one is the real steroid user. Panel: Dave Shultz, Superstar Billy Graham, Terry Funk, Dave Meltzer. Host: Steven DeTruth.

(9) SNEAK ATTACK—Game

DEBUT: Jim Cornette hosts this new game where the element of surprise can lead to being ejected. In the opener, taped in Jackson, TN, a fan climbs over the rail and lifts Corny's headsets to discuss comparable services their mothers have performed.

(38) CLOSER LOOK—Faith Daniels

Faith's guest is Larry Zbyszko, who discusses what it's like to be a designated jobber after 17 glorious years.

11 A.M.**(3) PRICE IS RIGHT—Game**

Host Bob Barker introduces a new game, "Chamber of Horrors," in which the loser is fried in an electric chair if he doesn't win \$25,000. (60 min.)

(9) OPRAH WINFREY—Discussion

Oprah's guest is Abdullah the Butcher, who demonstrates techniques in how to make pectoral muscles expand without implants. (60 min.)

(38) TERRY FUNK—Discussion

DEBUT: Terry walks out on his show after the first day when he declares the audience is too full of "simple-minded people." He tells his producer to bring him a talking dog. (60 min.)

12 NOON**(3) YOUNG AND THE RESTLESS—Serial**

Victor and Ashley become concerned when Alexandra (Terri Bontright) comes to work at Jabot as a computer analyst after losing her job in Atlanta; Kay Chancellor attempts to uncover a mystery when she receives a mysterious letter signed "Mrs. Cornette, Jim's mother." (60 min.)

(9) ALL MY CHILDREN—Serial

Erica tells Missy it's time for her to cut back on the lipstick and the eye shadow; Missy tells Erica she's gonna go tell somebody; Abby splashes Missy in a horse trough. (60 min.)

(38) DAYS OF OUR LIVES—Serial

Julie learns that Steve and Jeannie are expecting a child; Sam and Nicola file for divorce; and Sting (Steve Borden) becomes a father. (60 min.)

1 P.M.**(3) AS THE WORLD TURNS—Serial**

Sid (Sid Eudy) tells Dr. Bob Hughes he has torn a bicep; Scott (Scott Steiner) tells Dr. Hughes he has torn a bicep; Billy (Wayne Coleman) tells Dr. Zahorian to take a flying leap. (60 min.)

(9) ONE LIFE TO LIVE—Serial

Dorian is lamenting after looking at her furniture and finding it has a dusty finish; Downtown Bruno changes his name to Harvey after being discovered with an advanced case of head lice; Johnny B. (Mark Merro) goes to a tanning booth and comes out singing like Little Richard. (60 min.)

(38) ANOTHER WORLD—Serial

Paul tells Jim he can't shave because he's stayed too long in a tanning booth and his skin is too burned; Kerry is arrested for forgery; Mark (Marcus Bagwell) leaves Bay City and is no longer a handsome stranger. (60 min.)

2 P.M.

(3) GUIDING LIGHT—Serial

Ed and Maureen discover Samantha and Bull are two pains; Bobby tells the district attorney he has to be fair to Flair; Curt discovers he's not perfect. (60 min.)

(9) GENERAL HOSPITAL—Serial

Dr. Hardy tells Wally Karbo he is definitely senile; Alan Quartermaine tells Sgt. Buddy Lee Parker he is definitely under indictment for impersonating a state trooper. (60 min.)

(38) SANTA BARBARA—Serial

Vince tells Dave (Dave Meltzer) he's never going to speak to him again; Jim Cornette dreams he's really Rob Petrie and Jim Herd is Alan Brady. (60 min.)

3 P.M.

(3) MOVIE—Drama

"Arms on Trial" (1991). Five wrestlers are called to testify in a court case about why a doctor sent them packages but Terry is released as a witness the week before the trial. (2 hrs.)

(9) MOVIE—Thriller

"Identity Crisis." A man with five different personalities tries to discover who he is. Man Mountain Darsow: Barry Darsow. Crusher Darsow: Barry Darsow. Khrusher Khrushchev: Barry Darsow. Demolition Smash: Barry Darsow. Repo Man: Barry Darsow. (2 hrs.)

(38) MOVIE—Futlity

"I Led Three Lives." Fact-based story of a man who changes identities three times within 18 months. Master Blaster Steel: Kevin Nash. Oz: Kevin Nash. Vinnie Vegas: Kevin Nash. Dorothy: Judy Garland. (2 hrs.)

5 P.M.

(3) EYEWITNESS NEWS

Dave Meltzer begins a five-part investigative series which will reveal the Michelangelo virus is what killed the York Foundation. (90 min.)

(9) ACTION NEWS

Ron Lemieux begins a three-part investigative report into alleged trouble within the Dangerous Alliance when Paul E. wants to rename Arn Anderson and Bobby Eaton Ren and Stimpy. (90 min.)

(38) NEWS CENTER 38

John Arezzi begins an investigative series, "The Meaning of Dreams," as he profiles Jim Cornette, who dreams he is Oliver Wendell Douglas and Jim Herd is Mr. Kimball.

6:30 P.M.

(3) CBS NEWS—Dan Rather

Jesse Ventura challenges Dan to a "grudge match" throwing low-calorie jello at each other. The loser has to walk off his own set.

(9) WORLD NEWS TONIGHT—Peter Jennings

On the American Agenda, Peter looks at our subconscious thoughts, profiling Jim Cornette, who dreams he's Gomer Pyle and Jim Herd is Sergeant Carter.

(38) NBC NEWS—Tom Brokaw

Arthur Kent offers an in-depth report on "Americans and Their Vocabulary." Interviewed is Black Bart, who discusses how Sam Houston hits you so hard, it knocks the dad-gum boogers out of your nose.

7 P.M.

(3) WHEEL OF FORTUNE—Game

One of Pat Sajak's contestants is Vince McMahon, who spins the wheel in an effort to find something that clicks.

(9) ENTERTAINMENT TONIGHT

Missy Hyatt and Jason Hervey spend the evening denying every engagement rumor ever written or aired about them.

(38) CURRENT AFFAIR—Magazine

Maureen O'Boyle looks at "Stages of Sleep." Interviewed is Jim Cornette, who tells about dreams that he's Dan Quayle and Jim Herd is George Bush and the two are pictured on the cover of *FIELD AND STREAM*.

7:30 P.M.

(3) HOGAN'S HEROES—Comedy

Col. Hulk is under attack at Stalag 13 by Billy and Dave and calls a recruit named Arsenio in an effort to bail him out.

(9) AMERICA'S FUNNIEST HOME VIDEOS

Tonight, Bob Saget offers \$100,000 for any existing segment featuring The Desperados, if they find

Stan Hansen.

(38) JEOPARDY!—Game
The Final Jeopardy answer: THE ORIENT EXPRESS. Correct question: What is a tag team consisting of Mr. Fuji and prune juice?

8 P.M.

(3) CANNON—Crime Drama
Frank (William Conrad) imports his nephew Joe Cannon (Joe Pedicino) into his detective agency after Joe brings in 20 Krystal burgers for the two of them to split.

(9) THE '92 VOTE—Elections
SPECIAL: Peter Jennings and David Brinkley investigate irregularities in the California Primary. Bill Clinton is declared the winner on the Democratic side but the decision is reversed when the board of elections referee says he was waking up from a nap and saw 25 Republicans casting illegal crossover votes. Dusty Rhodes offers analysis as to why. (Live; 60 min.)

(38) DINOSAURS—Comedy
Sting's new baby arrives and takes one look at Sting and yells, "NOT THE MAMA!"

8:30 P.M.

(38) WONDER YEARS—Comedy
Wayne (Jason Hervey) is fired from the show after making too many appearances at the Bull Drop Inn.

9 P.M.

(3) MATLOCK—Drama
Ben (Andy Griffith) defends Jim Herd (Ed Asner) against charges he tried to kill Atlanta. Prosecution Witness: Jim Cornette. (60 min.)

(9) BARBARA WALTERS—Interview
Barbara visits with Jim Ross, who discusses why he wants to strangle meteorologist Curt Mellish; Jake Roberts and Eric Embry, who explain where they learned how to hit women; and Theodore R. Long, who describes calling a friend to say, "I'm gonna quit, Eddie. Eddie, I'm gonna quit!" (60 min.)

(38) MOVIE—Drama; 2 hrs.
"A Toxic Affair" (Made-for-TV; 1992). Lex (Terry Lester) tells Harley he doesn't want to ride down the road with Mr. Hughes any more because Curtis is suffering from flatulence. Curtis: Fred Berry.

10 P.M.

(3) JOE PEDICINO/LARRY SHREEVE
ULTRA SLIM-FAST TELETHON
SPECIAL: Joe and Larry (Abdullah the Butcher) attempt to fast for 20 hours along with guest entertainment and exercise segments from Virgil Runnels, Mike Shaw, Tug Taylor, Buddy Rose, Kimala and Reggie Bennett, along with clips from the late Kate Smith. (Live; 20 hrs.)

(9) QUANTUM LEAP—Adventure
Sam (Scott Bakula) is hurled to Atlanta where he becomes a pro wrestler managed by Jim Cornette, who goes into a trance and imagines he's Jane Hathaway and Jim Herd is Milburn Drysdale. (60 min.)

11 P.M.

(9) ARSENIO HALL
Arsenio's guests are Richard Nixon, G. Gordon Liddy and Terry Bollea, who discuss their pasts in total candor. (60 min.)

(38) TWILIGHT ZONE
"Depart for Dallas." Bradford (Jim Cornette) is sent through a time machine and winds up in Dallas as Cliff Barnes. J.R. Ewing: Jim Herd. (60 min.)

11:30 P.M.

(38) FIGHTLINE—Ted Koppel
Ted airs live from Milwaukee as the audience gets into a brawl when Rick Rude throws a drink in Sting's face and Dennis Coralluzzo rips the earring from Lou Albano's cheek. (Live; 90 min.)

12 MIDNIGHT

(3) TELETHON CONTINUES
Boni Blackstone has to send for medical attention when Joe passes out after having a Dunkin' Donut, a double-cheese Little Caesar's Pizza and a cake from the deli at Kroger waved in his face. Boni accepts a \$25,000 contribution from the makers of Sweet 'n' Low. Boni also tells a convenience store clerk Joe's had gas for 10 years. (Live)

(9) JOHNNY CARSON
On Johnny's final night, the set goes into chaos when Paul Heyman and the Dangerous Alliance burst onto the set as Paul clobbers Doc and Ed with his phone and tells them, "You're on TV's Bloopers and Practical Jokes." (60 min.)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All photographs in MATWATCH: THE FINAL CHAPTER are by Steve Bryant, with the exception of the Cactus Jack pictures, which are all from the John Arezzi Collection, as photographed by Richard Nieves, 55 Sycamore St., Brentwood NY 11717.

Bryant's photos are available from Steve at: P.O. Box 2995, Murfreesboro TN 37133-2995. Write him for a complete catalog of available shots.

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As a final note to readers of the annual, for those who have asked is there another book-length possibility, perhaps THE FINAL CHAPTER: BOOK II...maybe. But don't ask until the end of the year.

You have been the most wonderful folks in the world over these past four years. Our old hotline number will still be available for FLASHBACK and some new answering machine messages will be created. Please consider this your personal thank-you note for the many unseen faces who have become friends since 1988. I hope we will have the chance to meet some day soon, if we have not already.

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